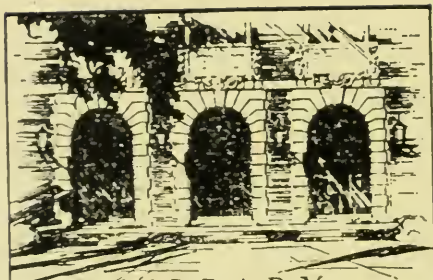


EDINA

BY THE AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE"



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E D I N A .

LONDON:
PRINTED BY J. OGDEN AND CO.,
172, ST. JOHN STREET, E.C.

EDINA:

A Novel.

BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD,

AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."



IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY & SON, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty.

1876.

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
XIV. MR. PELLET IN THE CHURCHYARD . . .	1
XV. LOOKING OUT FOR EDINA . . .	24
XVI. UNEXPECTED COMMOTION . . .	53
XVII. BROUGHT TO THE SURFACE . . .	71
XVIII. A DANGEROUS ENEMY . . .	95

PART THE SECOND.

I. AT EAGLES' NEST . . .	125
II. APPREHENSIONS . . .	144
III. A TIGER . . .	168
IV. AT JETTY'S . . .	195
V. WORSE THAN PEAS AND HORSEHAIR . . .	218
VI. STARTLING TIDINGS . . .	243
VII. FRANK RAYNOR FOLLOWED . . .	264

EDINA.



CHAPTER XIV.

MR. PELLET IN THE CHURCHYARD.

TRENNACH churchyard was a lonely place at all times : but it looked particularly so in the twilight of a dull evening. The trees took fantastic shapes to the eye ; the headstones stood up like white spectres ; the grave-mounds reminded you unpleasantly that you yourself must sometime lie beneath them.

Especially grey were the skies this evening ; for, though it was summer weather, the day had been a very dull day : and Mr. Blase Pellet, sitting in the middle of the churchyard on the old stump of a cut-down tree, looked grey and gloomy as the weather and the graves.

Since the departure from Trennach of Rosaline Bell—for whom Mr. Blase Pellet did un-

doubtedly entertain a fond and earnest affection, whatever might have been his shortcomings generally—he had found his evening hours, when the chemist's shop was closed for the night, hang heavily on his hands. With the absence of Rosaline, the two chief relaxations in which Mr. Blase had employed his leisure were gone: namely, the cunning contrivings to meet her, either at her own home or abroad; and his watchings of the movements of Frank Raynor. The young man's jealousy of the latter and Rosaline burnt as fiercely as ever, tormenting him to a most unreasonable degree: though, indeed, when was jealousy ever amenable to reason? There was no longer any personal intercourse between Frank Raynor and Rosaline; Blase knew quite well that could not be, for Frank was here, and she was at Falmouth; but he had felt as sure, ever since she went, that their intercourse was continued by letter, as that he was now sitting on the stump of the tree.

Jealousy needs no proof to confirm its fancies: our great master-intellect has told us that it makes the food it feeds on. And upon this airy kind of unsubstantial food had Mr.

Pellet been nourishing his suspicions of the supposed mutual correspondence—which existed in his imagination alone. He had watched the postman in a morning, he had waylaid him, and by apparently artless questions had got him to disclose to whom the letter was addressed, which he had just left at Dr. Raynor's: and the less proof he could find of the suspected postal intercourse, the brighter did his untenable jealousy burn. For it was not often that the postman could say the letter, which he might have chanced to leave at the Doctor's house, was for Mr. Frank Raynor. Sometimes it would be for the Doctor himself, sometimes for Miss Raynor; but very rarely for Frank. Frank's correspondence did not seem to be an extensive one. This might possibly have satisfied an ordinary young man; it only tended to strengthen Mr. Blase Pellet's raging doubts: and now, on this ill-favoured evening, those doubts had received "confirmation strong as proofs of holy writ."

Since there could be no longer love-meetings of his own to seek, or surreptitious dodgings of other people to pursue, Mr. Blase Pellet was rather at a loss to know what to do with his

evenings. To render him justice, it must be admitted that he did not follow the fashion, and spend them, however soberly, at the Golden Shaft. He was a steady, well-conducted young man, superior to his apparent position, and better in some respects than many of his neighbours. Finding the hours lie on his hands, he took to look in unceremoniously at the houses of his acquaintance, and pass an interlude in chat more or less agreeable. On this evening he had so favoured Clerk Trim; and it was in crossing the churchyard, after quitting that functionary's dwelling, that he had come to an anchor on the stump. Bitter anger was aroused within him; raging jealousy; a tumultuous thirst for revenge. For, in the clerk's house he had just been furnished, as he believed, with the confirmation yearned for.

When Frank Raynor, so lightly and heedlessly, had sent Clerk Trim to Tello, to inquire for certain imaginary letters at the post-office there, he little thought what grave consequences would arise from it in the future. Just for the sake of getting the clerk out of the way during the ceremony of the stolen marriage, he had invented this fruitless errand. When the

clerk came back in the course of the day, and reported to him that no letter was lying for him at the post-office at Tello, the man added, "And I've taken care not to mention to a soul, sir, where I have been, as you desired ; neither will I." "Oh, thank you, but I don't in the least mind now whether you mention it or not," rejoined Frank in the openness of his heart. For, now that the object was attained, it did not matter to him if all the world knew that he had sent the clerk to Tello.

Clerk Trim was naturally a silent man, and therefore he had experienced no temptation to speak of it, in spite of the release given him : but on this evening, talking with Blase Pellet of Tello, he chanced to say that he had been there not long ago. Mr. Blase expressed some surprise at this, knowing that journeys were rare events with the clerk ; and then Trim mentioned what he had gone for : to inquire for a letter at the Tello post-office for Mr. Frank Raynor.

That was enough. And a great deal more than enough. Blase instantly jumped to the conclusion that it was *there*, through the Tello post-office, that the correspondence with Rosa-

line was carried on. And perhaps it was not unnatural that he should think so. The paucity of letters arriving for Frank at Trennach was accounted for now.

Forth he came, boiling and bursting, crossed the stile, and dropped down on the tree-stump, unable to get any farther. The very fact of the correspondence being carried on clandestinely made it more cruel for him. With his bitter indignation mingled a great deal of despair. In that one miserable moment he began to see that he might indeed lose Rosaline. To lose her would have been anguish unspeakable; but to see another gain her was simply torment—and that other the detested gentleman, Frank Raynor. Blase Pellet had not a very clear idea of social distinctions, and he saw no particular incongruity in Frank's making her his wife.

"I've kept quiet as yet about that past night's work," said Mr. Pellet to himself, "but I'll speak now. I kept quiet for her sake, knowing what pain it would bring her; not for his; and because ——

"Well, any way," he resumed after the long pause which succeeded to his sudden break off,

“I must feel my way in it. If I can only drive him away from Cornwall for good, that would be enough; and then I’d draw in again. I heard him tell old Float that he meant to be off to London soon and settle there: let him go, and leave me and Rose and these parts alone. I’ll help to start him there; and when he’s gone I’ll keep silent again. But now—how much will it be safe to say?—and *what* can I say?—and how can I set about it?”

Leaning forward, his two hands placed on his knees, pressing them almost to pain, his eyes fixed on the opposite hedge, he thought out his thoughts. Blase Pellet was of an extremely concentrative nature: he could revolve and debate doubts and difficulties in his own mind, until he saw his way to bring them out straight in the end, just as patiently and successfully as a Cambridge student works out a problem in Euclid. But the difficulty Blase was trying to solve now was not easy.

“I *can’t* say I saw it,” debated he. “I can’t say I heard it. If I did, people would ask five hundred questions, as to where I was, and how it came about, and why I did not give the alarm—and I might have to tell all.

I don't care to do that. I won't do it, unless I'm forced. Let him go away and leave her alone hereafter, and he shall get off scot-free for me. If I told of him, I should have to tell of her—that she was present—and she'd not like it; neither should I, for I'd be sorry to bring the pain and exposure on her. She ought to have dencunced him at the time—and she was a regular simpleton for not doing it: but still it would not be pleasant for me to be the one to proclaim that she was there and witnessed it all. No, no: I may not say I know *that*: I dare not say I was a witness myself. I must find some other way."

The other way seemed to be a mile off. Mr. Pellet took his eyes from the hedge, and his hands from his knees; but only to fix them on the same places again. The stump of the tree was as uneasy a seat as its once green and flourishing topmost bough must have been, to judge by the restless fit that was upon him as he sat on it.

"Could I say I dreamt it?" cried he suddenly, ceasing his shuffling, and holding his head bolt upright. *Could I?* I don't see any other way. Let's think it out a bit."

The thinking out took a tolerably long time yet, and Mr. Pellet did not seem altogether to like his idea. It was pretty nearly pitch dark when he at length rose from the stump, sighing heavily.

“I must be uncommonly cautious,” said he. “But it’s just one of those ticklish things that admit of no openings but one. If Rosaline got to know that I saw—and told—she’d just fling me over for ever. I think a word or two of suspicion will be enough to drive him away, and that’s all the end I want.”

Now, in the main, Blase Pellet was not a hard-hearted or vindictive young man. His resentment against Frank Raynor arose from jealousy. Even that resentment, bitter though it was, he did not intend, or wish, to gratify to anything like its full extent. Believing that certain testimony of his could place Frank’s neck in jeopardy, he might surely be given credit for holding his tongue. It is true that his caution arose from mixed motives: the dread of exasperating, or in any way compromising Rosaline; the dislike to mix himself up with the doings of that past night; and the genuine horror of bringing any man to so dire

a punishment, even though that man were Frank Raynor.

Pondering upon these various doubts and difficulties, and failing to feel perfectly reassured upon them in his own mind—or rather upon what the result would be if he moved in the matter—Mr. Pellet went slowly home through the dark and deserted street; and ascended straight to his chamber, which was an attic in the roof. There, he put himself down on the side of his low bed in much the same musing attitude that he had sat on the tree-stump, and “thought it out” again.

“Yes, it must be a dream,” he decided at length, beginning to unbutton his waistcoat preparatory to retiring. “There is no other way. I must not say I was there and saw it—they’d turn round upon me and cry out, Why didn’t you tell before now?—why did you not tell at the time?—and what could I answer? Moreover, I can’t and I won’t bring in Rosaline’s name—which I should have to do if I stated the truth outright. But I can say I dreamt it: dreamt that Bell is lying at the bottom of the shaft; and keep up the commotion for a short while. They can’t turn round

on me for *that*. Folks do dream, as all the world knows."

With this final resolve, Mr. Blase Pellet put himself into bed, to dream real dreams instead of inventing them.

As the days went on at the Mount, the lovers' meetings became more rare. Far from being able to steal out every evening, Margaret found that she could hardly get out at all. She was virtually a prisoner, so far as her evening's liberty was concerned. Either she had to stay in, reading to Lydia, or playing at cards with her, or else Mrs. St. Clare would have her in the drawing-room. Upon only a half movement of Daisy's towards the open glass doors, Mrs. St. Clare would say, "You cannot go out in the evening air, Daisy: I shall have you ill next."

Evening after evening Frank Raynor betook himself to the grounds about the Mount, and lingered in their wilderness, waiting for Daisy. Evening after evening he had to go back again as he came, not having seen her. But one evening, when his patience was exhausted, and he had taken the first step of departure, Daisy

came flying through the trees and fell into his arms.

“I was determined to come,” she said, a nervous sobbing catching her breath. “I am watched, Frank; I am perpetually hindered. Mamma has just gone to her room with a headache, and I ran out. Oh Frank, this cannot go on. I have so wanted to see you!”

“It has been uncommonly hard, I can tell you, Daisy, to come here, one evening after another, and to have to go back as I came.”

“This is the *first* opportunity I have had. It is indeed, Frank. And if that Tabitha should come prying into the drawing-room, as I know she will, and finds me gone out of it, I don’t care. No, I don’t.”

He took her upon his arm and they paced together as formerly. The moon was bright to-night, and flickered through the leaves on Daisy’s head.

“Of course this cannot go on,” observed Frank, in assent to what she had just said. “I should make a move at once, but for one thing.”

“What sort of move.”

“To leave Trennach. The reason I have not done so, is this, Daisy. In speaking again

the other morning to my uncle, telling him that I must go to London, he made no further opposition to it : only, he begged me to remain with him until Edina returned —— ”

“ Where is she going ? ” interrupted Daisy.

“ To Bath. On a week or ten days’ visit to Major and Mrs. Raynor. Daisy, I should not *like* to leave my uncle alone ; he is not well enough to be left ; and therefore I will stay as he wishes. But as soon as Edina is back here, I will go to London, and see about our future home.”

“ Yes,” said Daisy. “ Yes.”

She spoke rather absently. Indeed, in spite of the first emotion, she appeared to be less lively than usual ; more pre-occupied. The fact was, she wanted to ask Frank a question or two, and did not know how to do it.

“ Edina goes to-morrow,” he resumed. “ She intends to be back in a week’s time ; but I give her a day or two longer, for I know how unwilling they always are at Spring Lawn to let her come away. After that, I wind up with the Doctor, and go to London. And it will not be very long then, Daisy, before I am back here to claim you. I shall soon get settled,

once I am on the spot and looking out: the grass will not be let grow under my feet. It won't take above a week or two."

How sanguine he was! Not a shadow of doubt rested on his mind that the "week or two" would see him well established. Daisy did not answer. Had Frank chanced to turn his head as they walked, he would have seen how white her face was.

It was a simple question that she wished to ask. And yet, she could not ask it. Her dry and quivering lips refused to frame the words. "Were you so very intimate with Rosaline Bell?—and did you really love her?" Easy words they seem to say; but Daisy could not get them out in her terrible emotion.

And so, they parted, and she had not spoken. For the hour was late already, and she feared to stay out longer. And Frank went home unsuspecting and unconscious.

It was on the following morning that certain rumours were afloat in Trennach. They had arisen the previous day: at least, two or three people professed to have then heard them. The miners congregated in groups to discuss the news; Float the chemist and other trades-

men stood at their shop doors, to exchange words on the subject with the passers-by. It was said that Josiah Bell was lying in the Bottomless Shaft. Instead of having walked off in some mysterious manner, to return some day as mysteriously—as his wife believed—he was lying dead in that deep pit on the Bare Plain.

But—whence arose these rumours? what was their foundation? Nobody could tell. Just like other unaccountable rumours that float about us and are whispered from one to the other in daily intercourse, it seemed that none could trace their source. “They say so.” Yes, but who are “they”?

This same morning was the one of Edina’s departure for the neighbourhood of Bath. Frank was about to drive her to the railway station. The Doctor’s gig was already at the door, the small trunk strapped on behind: for she never encumbered herself with much luggage. Frank was in the surgery, busying himself until she should appear, and talking with his uncle, when the door opened, and Ross, the overseer, came in. He had not been well lately, and came occasionally to the surgery for advice.

“Have you heard this new tale they’ve got hold of now, Doctor?” asked he, while Dr. Raynor was questioning him of his symptoms. “It’s a queer one.”

“I have heard no tale,” said the Doctor. “What is it?”

“That the missing man is lying at the bottom of the old shaft on the Plain.”

“What missing man?”

“Josiah Bell.”

A moment’s startled pause; a rush of red to his brow; and then Frank spoke up hastily from his place amid the bottles.

“What an utter absurdity! Who says so?”

“It is being said among the men,” replied Ross, turning to him. “They can talk of nothing else this morning.”

The colour was receding from Frank’s face, leaving it whiter than usual.

“Bell at the bottom of the shaft on the Plain!” exclaimed Dr. Raynor. “But why are they saying it? Who says it?”

Ross extended his hand, and pointed to the knots of men in the street, some of whom were in view of the window. “All the lot of them, Doctor. They are talking of nothing else.”

“What are their grounds for saying it?”

“I’ve not got to them yet. I don’t think they know.”

Since the first hasty words, Frank had remained dumb, apparently paying attention to his physie. He spoke again now in a sharp, rasping tone; which was very unusual, and therefore noticeable.

“It is not *likely* that there are grounds for it. I wonder, Ross, you can come here and repeat such nonsense!”

“The place is agog with it; that’s all I know,” replied Ross, sulkily, as he went out. He could not bear to be found fault with.

Dr. Raynor followed him to the door. After a glance up and down the street at the men, collected in it, he returned to the surgery.

“It is evident that something or other is stirring them,” he observed to Frank. “I wonder what can have led to the report?”

“Some folly or other, Uncle Hugh. It will die away again.”

Dr. Raynor stood near the window; his eyes were fixed on the outer scenes, but his mind was far away. Frank, who had made a finish of his physie, stood buttoning his coat.

“I have never believed aught but the worst, since Bell’s disappearance,” said the Doctor. “Others have expected him to come back again : I never have. Where he may be, I know not : whether accident, or aught else of ill, may have chanced to him, I know not : but I entertain no hope that the man is still in life.”

There was a pause. “Have you any reason for saying that, sir ?” asked Frank, somewhat hesitatingly.

“No reason in the world,” replied Dr. Raynor. “At least, no tangible reason. I am an old man, Frank, and you are a young one ; and what I am about to say you will probably laugh at. I did not like the look of Bell when we last saw him.”

Frank was at a loss to understand : and said so.

“I did not like that grey look on his face,” continued the Doctor. “Do you remember it ?”

“Yes, I do, Uncle Hugh. It was very peculiar. Sometimes when a person is ill, or going to be ill, the face will take quite a grey tinge from the loss of colour, and we say to him or her, You are looking grey this morn-

ing. But the grey shade on Bell's face was quite different."

"Just so," assented the Doctor. "And it takes an educated eye—or, I would rather say, an eye possessing a peculiar innate discernment—to be able to distinguish the one shade from the other: but, to the eye which can do so, it is unmistakable. The grey hue that was on Bell's face I had observed three times before during my life, in three different men; but in each of the cases it was the forerunner of death."

Dr. Raynor's voice had taken a solemn tone. Frank, far from laughing, seemed to catch it as he spoke.

"Do you mean the forerunner of fatal sickness, sir?"

"Only in one of the cases, Frank. The man had been ill for a long while, but his death was entirely unexpected and sudden. The other two had no sickness at all, short or long: they died without it."

"From accident?"

"Yes, from accident. I should not be likely to avow as much to anybody but you, Frank, and run the risk of being ridiculed: but I tell

you that when I saw Bell come in here that morning, with the peculiar grey look on his face, it shocked me. I believed then, as firmly as I ever believed any truth in my life, that the man's hours were numbered."

Frank neither stirred nor spoke. Just for the moment he might have been thought a statue.

"Where Bell is, or where he got to, I know not; but from the time I first heard of his disappearance, I feared the man was dead," added Dr. Raynor. "The probability was, I thought, that he had fallen down in some fit, that had been, or would be, fatal. And I confess the great marvel to me throughout, has been, that his body could not be found. If this rumour be true—that he is lying at the bottom of the used-up shaft—the marvel is accounted for."

"But—is—is it likely to be true, sir?" cried Frank, in hot remonstrance.

"Very likely, I think," replied the Doctor. "Though I cannot imagine what should bring him *there*."

"Are you ready, Frank?" asked Edina, appearing at the door in her grey plaid shawl

and plain straw bonnet. "Good-bye, papa. I have been looking for you."

Dr. Raynor stooped to kiss his daughter quietly: he was not a demonstrative man. Hester was at the door: the boy held the horse's head. Frank helped Edina in; and, taking the reins in his hand, followed her.

"You will not stay too long, Edina?"

"Only the eight or nine days that I am going for, papa."

They drove on. It was a lovely summer's day; and Edina, who enjoyed the sunshine, the balmy atmosphere, the blue sky, the waving trees, and everything else pertaining to this serene out-door life, sat still and looked about her. Frank was unusually silent. In point of fact, the rumour he had just heard, touching Bell, had well-nigh struck him dumb. Edina might have wondered at this prolonged silence of his, but that she was deep in thought herself.

"Frank," she began, as they neared the station, "I wish you would answer me a question."

He glanced quickly round at her, dread in his heart. Did the question concern the Bottomless Shaft?

“Do you know whether anything is amiss with papa?”

It was like a relief; and Frank, ever elastic, brightened up at once.

“Amiss with him? In what way, Edina?”

“With himself; with his health. In the last few weeks he seems to have changed so very much: sometimes he seems quite like a broken-down old man. Don’t you see that he is ill, Frank?”

“Yes, I am sure he is,” replied Frank, readily. “But I don’t know what it is that’s the matter with him.”

“It seems to me that he wants rest.”

“He gets more rest than he used to get, Edina; I save him all I can. There are some cranky patients who *will* have him, you know.”

“I hope it is nothing serious! Do you think he will soon be better?”

Frank touched the horse with the whip: which perhaps made his excuse for not answering. “Had Uncle Hugh been in active condition, I should have left him before this,” he observed. “But I want to see him stronger first. He might chance to get some fellow in

my place who would not be willing to take most of the work on his own shoulders."

"Left him to set up for yourself, do you mean, Frank?"

"To be sure. I ought to, you know," he added with a slight laugh.

She understood the allusion. It was the first time Frank's stolen marriage had been alluded to by either of them, since the day it took place.

"How are you getting on, Frank?" she asked in a low tone, as he drew up outside the station. "You and Daisy?"

"Not getting on at all. She is there, and I am elsewhere. Now and then I see her for five minutes in their garden; but that's pretty nearly stopped now. Until last night, she has been unable to escape from the house for I don't know how long. Of course it is not a lively condition of things."

"It seems to me to be the same thing with you as though you had not been married."

"It is just precisely the same, Edina."

CHAPTER XV.

LOOKING OUT FOR EDINA.

IN the bow-window of the shabby dining-room at Spring Lawn, gazing through it earnestly, stood Major Raynor, his wife, and the children. They were on the tiptoe of expectation, waiting for Edina. A vehicle of some kind could be discerned in the road at a distance; opinions differed, as to whether it was a fly, or not. The evening sunbeams fell athwart the green lawn and on the clustering flowers, whose perfume mingled with that of the hay, lying in cocks in the adjoining field.

"I am sure it *is* a fly," cried little Kate, shading her eyes with her hands, that she might see the better.

"And I tell you it is not," retorted Alfred. "That thing, whatever it is, is coming on at a snail's pace, like a waggon. Do you suppose Edina is coming in a waggon, little stupid?"

"I don't think it is a waggon," said Major Raynor, who had the aid of an opera-glass. "It has two horses abreast, at any rate. The driver is whipping them up, too: and see—it is coming along now at a strapping pace. I should say it is a large fly."

Every now and then the vehicle lost itself behind trees and hedges and turnings of the road: from the temporary glimpses they caught, it seemed to have something like a cart-load of luggage piled upon its roof. Which was extremely unlikely to belong to Edina.

On, it came: its sound now could be heard, though itself was no longer visible. All ears were bent to catch it: and when abreast of the narrow avenue that led to the garden gate it was decidedly heard to turn off the road and rattle down.

"It is a fly," spoke Alice, triumphantly. "And it is bringing Edina."

Charles strolled out to the gate to be in readiness. Away tore the children after him, shouting Edina's name in every variety of voice. Major and Mrs. Raynor followed, and were just in time to be at the drawing-up of the vehicle.

It was not a fly. It was a large, lumbering, disreputable conveyance that plied between Bath and some villages daily, and was called Tuppin's van. Disreputable as compared with a genteel, exclusive Bath fly that carried gentlefolks.. This was used only by the inferior classes ; people who knew nothing about "society."

Nevertheless, Edina was in it. Old Tuppin, throwing the reins across his horses, had left his box to go round to the door ; which opened at the back after the manner of an omnibus. A sudden silence had fallen on the children. Edina got out. And Tuppin, touching his hat to Major and Mrs. Raynor, selected her trunk from the luggage on the roof, and set it down inside the gate. Three male passengers, seated outside in front of the luggage, watched the proceedings.

Edina put a shilling into Tuppin's hand. He thanked her, ascended to his seat, touched his horses, turned them round, and drove up the avenue with a clatter. Edina was smothered with greetings and kisses on the lawn.

"But how could you come in that van, Edina ?"

“The carriages at the station were scarce to-day, Charley. The only one I could see wanted to charge me six shillings. This van—but I call it an omnibus—was waiting there for a passenger, and I took advantage of it.”

“It is Tuppin’s van,” persisted Charley. “Nobody ever travels by it, except servants.”

“Nobody with a full pocket, perhaps,” smiled Edina, with her straightforwardness and her imperturbable good humour. “I paid a shilling only, and came very comfortably.”

“There was an old woman inside as well as you, Edina,” cried Alfred.

“Yes. It was she who came by the same train that I did, and got out at the station. She is housekeeper, she told me, in some family near here.”

Edina caught up little Bobby as she spoke, and the matter dropped. But an impression remained on the minds of the elder children that Edina was more stingy than ever, or she would never have travelled in Tuppin’s van when she could have had a fly for the hiring. Certainly Edina’s ways were saving ways. As contrasted with their own reckless ones, they might appear “stingy.” But the time was to

come when they would learn how mistaken was the impression, and how entirely they had misjudged her.

“And how are you getting on, Uncle Francis?” asked Edina.

“Backwards, my dear. What with no money, so to say, coming in, and everything going out ——”

The Major stopped for want of words to express adequately the position. Edina resumed.

“But you have some money coming in, Uncle Francis. You have your income.”

“But what is it, my dear, as compared with expenses? Besides, to tell you the truth, it is always forestalled. There always seems to be such a lot to pay.”

“How uneasy it must make you!”

“Not a bit of it,” spoke the Major, cheerily. “With Eagles’ Nest to look to in prospective, it does not signify at all. Talking of Eagles’ Nest, Edina, have you heard anything of your Aunt Ann lately?”

“We never do hear from her, Uncle Francis. Papa writes to her sometimes, and I write, but we never get an answer.”

“I fear she is on her last legs.”

The Major spoke solemnly, with quite a rueful expression of countenance. Badly though he wanted the money that his sister's death would bring, and estranged from him though she was, he could not and did not think of it in any spirit but a sad one.

"I have heard from London two or three times lately, Edina, from my lawyer: John Street, you know. And in each letter he has given me a very poor account of Mrs. Atkinson. Her death, poor soul, must be very near."

It had been nearer than the Major, or even his lawyer, anticipated. She was dead. At this very moment, when the Major was talking of her, she was lying dead at Eagles' Nest. Had been dead three or four hours.

News of it reached them in the morning. A letter was delivered at Spring Lawn, and was carried up, as usual, to the Major in bed. Nobody took any particular notice of the letter; as a rule, the Major's letters were but applications from creditors, and could not be supposed to interest the household. Mrs. Raynor was seated at breakfast with her three elder children and Edina, when a sudden bumping

on the floor above, and shouts in the Major's voice, startled them considerably.

"Good gracious! he must have fallen out of bed!" cried poor Mrs. Raynor.

"And upset his coffee," said Charley, with a laugh.

But it was nothing of the kind. The Major had jumped up to dress himself in hot haste, and was calling out to them between whiles. He had received news of the death of his sister, Mrs. Atkinson; and was going up forthwith to Eagles' Nest.

"Shall I go too, papa?" asked Charley.

"I don't mind, my boy. I suppose we can scrape up enough money for the tickets."

Of course the children were all in a commotion. Alfred marched up to the nursery, and drew the blinds down.

"What is that for, Master Alfred?" demanded nurse, who was dressing Kate's doll; Kate herself standing by to watch the process.

"Ah, you don't know," replied Alfred, bursting with impatience to deliver his news, yet withholding it tantalizingly.

"No, I don't," said the nurse, who was often at war with Alfred. "You will have the good-

ness, sir, to draw the blinds up again, and leave them alone."

"I choose to have them down, nurse."

"You will choose to walk out of my nursery in a minute or two," retorted the nurse. "Wait till I've fixed this frock on. It would be a precious good thing if you were at school, Master Alfred!"

"But I am not going to school," cried Alfred in irrepressible delight, the good news refusing to be kept down any longer. "I'm going somewhere else. Old Aunt Atkinson's dead, and papa has come into Eagles' Nest and a large fortune, Madam Nurse! And he is going up there to-day; and Charley's going; and we shall go directly. Eagles' Nest! Won't I have a pony to myself!—and a double-barrelled gun!—and a whole shop-full of sweet-stuff!"

Vaulting over little Robert, who sat on the floor staring at him, he caught hold of Kate in the exuberance of his anticipations, and whirled her round till she was giddy. Then, attempting a leap across the table, he caught his foot on its edge; boy, table, and a heavy pincushion that was on it, called a "doctor," all came

down together. The noise was something wonderful. It brought up Edina and Alice.

“Whatever is it, nurse?”

“Only one of Master Alfred’s freaks, ma’am. He thought he would leap over the table.”

Alfred was holding his handkerchief to his nose. He would not acknowledge that it bled.

“We thought the house was falling,” said Alice. “It was worse than papa. He gave us the first fright.”

“And all because he has come into some money, he says, Miss Raynor,” put in the nurse, who was angrily picking up the table, “and the money is to buy him everything under the sun.”

“Unseemly boasting, Alfred!” cried Edina. “Had you no thought for your poor aunt?”

“I don’t see why I should have, Edina,” returned the boy boldly. “I never saw Aunt Atkinson in my life : why should I pretend to put on sorrow for her?”

“I never said you were to, child. Sorrow is real enough, and perhaps, Alfred, you will find that it comes to you often enough in life, without putting it on. But there is a wide gulf between feigning to be sorrowful, and

being boisterously elated. As to the fortune, it may not make very much difference to you in any way."

"Oh, won't it though, Edina! Charley's not going to get it all."

"About the blinds, ma'am? Are they to be kept down?"

"I don't know, nurse. I will ask Mrs. Raynor."

"What an old croaker she is!" exclaimed Alfred, as Edina left the room.

"A bit of one," assented Alice.

"That she is not, Miss Alice," said the nurse. "If all of you were only half as good as Miss Edina Raynor!"

When the necessary money for the journey came to be looked after, it was found that the Major and all his household could not scrape it together: though it sounds like a ridiculous fact. Edina came forward with help; and so it was raised.

"I trust it will be all right, Uncle Francis," whispered Edina with earnest sympathy, as she crossed the lawn with the Major when he was departing.

"Right in what way, my dear?"

“That you will inherit Eagles’ Nest.” .

“Oh, that is all right,” replied the Major
“My letter tells me so. Everything is willed to me. Poor Ann!—Good-bye, my dear: be sure you stay until we return.—What a hot walk we shall have of it into Bath!” added the Major, taking off his hat and rubbing his brow in anticipation already. “But there’s no help for it; no conveyance of any kind at hand. I’d be glad of Tuppin’s van this morning.”

Edina stood at the gate, and watched them up the avenue, Charley carrying the black portmanteau. In her steadfast, earnest eyes, there lay a certain expression of *rest*. With her habit of looking forward to the dark side of things as well as the bright, Edina had never felt quite assured upon the point of the Major’s inheritance: it was welcome, indeed, to hear that this was placed beyond doubt. What would that improvident, helpless family have done without it!

A hand stole itself within Edina’s arm. She turned her soft dark eyes, to see Mrs. Raynor; who looked, as usual, very mild about the face, and very limp about the dress. The children had rushed indoors again, and were restlessly

running from room to room in the excitement of their new prospects, discussing the wonders that would become theirs, now wealth and greatness had fallen to their portion. Their minds were picturing the future residence at Eagles' Nest all gold, and glitter, and gladness: life was to be as one long Lord Mayor's day.

“It is a great strain removed, Edina!”

“What is, Mary?” For Edina had never called this young wife of her uncle's “Aunt.” It had been “Mary” from the first. They were not so very many years removed from one another in age.

“All the distress and contrivings about money. I have never said much to you, for where was the use; but you don't know what a strain upon the feelings it has been, what shifts we have been put to.”

“I do,” said Edina. “I can only too readily imagine it. For many years the same strain lay on me and papa: at Trennach, and before we went to Trennach. It is removed now in a degree, for the necessity for saving does not exist as it did, but we are careful still. I learnt economical ways in my pinafores, Mary, and shall never forget them. Your children could

not understand my coming here in Tuppin's van yesterday, when I might have hired a fly : but it saved five shillings. Papa is given to urge economy upon me still, and to practise it himself. I think he does so for my sake."

"Ah ! what *could* you do, Edina, if anything happened to your father, and you were left without the means to live ? "

Edina laughed at the consternation expressed in Mrs. Raynor's voice. To this really helpless woman, the being left without means seemed as the very greatest of all earthly calamities.

"I should have no fear for myself, Mary. I would go out as useful companion ; or plain governess ; or even as housekeeper. Few places of practical usefulness would come amiss to me."

"That's true, I am sure," said Mrs. Raynor.

They were strolling across the grass-plot arm-in-arm, Mrs. Raynor stooping to pluck a flower here and there : a June rose ; a pink ; a morsel of syringa from amid the shrubs.

"How sweet they are, Edina ! Take them."

"Sweet indeed ! And I must gather one for

myself : a lily-of-the-valley. It is my favourite flower of all flowers.”

The lily-of-the-valley picked, they strolled on again. Silence had supervened. Mrs. Raynor was puzzling her brains over the children’s mourning : what would, and what would not be necessary, and how it would all get made.

“ What are you going to do with Charles ? ” suddenly asked Edina.

“ With Charles ! I’m sure I don’t know. Why, Edina ? ”

“ It is so sad to see a fine young fellow, as he is, with all his wits and capabilities about him, spending his days in idleness. I had meant to talk to Uncle Francis about it to-day. I do think, Mary, it has been a great mistake.”

“ Well, dear, perhaps it has,” replied the equable woman. “ But you see, it takes so much money to bring young men on in life : and we had no money to spare.”

“ Then, where money lacks, they should be ‘ brought on ’ in some way that does not take money,” rejoined Edina. “ Charles has been absolutely idle ; and only from the want of being directed to be otherwise. Even Frank

saw the error. When he returned to us the last time from his short stay here, he said what a pity it was."

"Charles wanted to be a barrister, I fancy. But the Major could not take any steps in it without money."

"Do you know what I should have done, Mary?—placed him in a lawyer's office as a temporary clerk, that he might be acquiring some knowledge of law while he was waiting."

"I declare we never thought of that," cried Mrs. Raynor. "Perhaps Charley would not have liked it, though."

"Perhaps not. I should have done it, for all that, had I been Uncle Francis. Nothing in the world is so pernicious to a young man as the indulgence in idle habits. Has Charles been reading law books?"

"No; only novels," said Mrs. Raynor.

"And yet the other might have been of great use to him! It has been just so much precious time wasted, Mary. These opening years of manhood are the best years in a young man's life. I mean as regards the acquirement of knowledge. The faculties are all awake, and thirsting for it. Later, they

get somewhat dulled, jaded, and the thirst diminishes."

"Well, it will all be right, Edina, now that he has Eagles' Nest to look forward to. Of course, he could look forward to it before; but there was always the doubt when we should come into it. Suppose Mrs. Atkinson had lived to be a hundred years old? Some people do. Where should we all have been then? or even to eighty or ninety?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Edina, smiling. "Suppose Uncle Francis should live to be a hundred, Mary? Where would Charley be in that case?"

"But, Edina, what would it matter? With a beautiful place like Eagles' Nest and means to keep it up, the children would always be sure of a home and of welcome there. It would be Charley's as much as ours. He ——"

"Oh, mamma! Oh, Edina! What do you think? Papa has gone without his shaving tackle, and without his boots!"

The salutation came from the children; all of them wildly rushing forth again to shout it out. They had been visiting the Major's dressing-room, and discovered that

these indispensable articles had been left behind.

“ They are his light summer boots, too ; those with the long name,” said Alice. “ He cannot walk about much in any others.”

“ Dear, dear, dear ! ” lamented Mrs. Raynor. “ He must have put on those tight, patched ones by mistake—and they always blister his heels. How will he be able to get to Bath ? ”

Eagles’ Nest was not large, but it was one of the prettiest places in all Kent. A long, low, ancient house of grey stone, covered in places with ivy. Some of its old-fashioned casements, with their small panes, had been replaced (many people said spoilt) by modern windows of plate glass, opening to terraces, to undulating lawns, and to beds of brilliant-hued flowers. Few old houses have so gay and cheerful an appearance as this house had : perhaps owing to the large windows and to other improvements. The entrance door stood in the middle, and was approached by three or four broad, low steps. Painted casements of rich and blended colours—blue, pink, violet, amethyst, and gold—threw their lovely tints

upon the tessellated pavement of the hall. Rooms opened on either side of it; bright, attractive rooms, that had a very *home* look, in spite of their beauty, with the large windows that let in the joyous sunlight, and outside Venetian blinds to draw down at will. It was altogether a compact, cheery, and most desirable residence; and it was at an easy and convenient distance by rail from London. The estate, in regard to its land, had been well kept up by Mrs. Atkinson. It was worth about two thousand a year; but was capable of much improvement.

When Major Raynor and his son arrived there in the course of the afternoon, the Major in some torment touching his heels and his boots, they were received by Mr. Street, the solicitor to the late Mrs. Atkinson. He was brother to Mr. Edwin Street, the acting partner in the Atkinson bank. John Street was the elder of the brothers: a man of sixty now, who was well known in London as a quiet and most respectable practitioner. He was reserved in his manners; not at all what could be called "genial," and rather severe than benevolent; strictly just, but perhaps not generous.

As the fly that brought the Major and his

son from the nearest station rattled up, Mr. Street appeared at the hall door : a little man in spectacles, with cold light eyes and very scanty hair.

“ I am glad you are come, Major Raynor.”

“ And I’m sure I’m glad to see that you are,” returned the Major, cordially holding out his hand. “ I might have found myself in a fog without you. I got your letter this morning.”

“ We received news of Mrs. Atkinson’s death yesterday afternoon ; her coachman was sent up to us with the tidings, and I wrote to you at once,” observed Mr. Street. “ As you are the sole inheritor, save for a few trifling legacies, and also the executor, I thought it well, as I stated in my letter, that you should be here.”

“ Just so,” said the Major. “ When did you get here yourself ? ”

“ I came down this morning.”

“ And I and Charley started off in a scuffle to catch the ten o’clock train—and I came away in my wrong boots, and—and Charley has been laughing at me. You don’t know him, Street—my eldest son and heir. Charley, come here, sir, and be introduced to Mr. Street.”

Charles Raynor had been looking from the open window. He had never seen so pretty a place before as this one, lying under the June sunshine. Hay was being made here, just as it had been in Somerset; and the sweet fresh smell came wafted to him on the summer breeze. The lawns were beautifully kept, the flowers were choice; shrubs clustered around, trees waved above. In the distance was spread out a beautiful landscape, than which nothing could have been more pleasing to the eye. Close by, curled the blue smoke from the little village of Grassmere, hidden by the trees from the view of its grand neighbour, Eagles' Nest. Surely in this spot man could find all his heart desired! Charley sighed as he turned in obedience to the call: the lad had a love for the beauties of nature.

"Had this been left to others instead of ourselves, how I should envy them, now that I have seen it!" said Charles to himself. And he was not thinking then of any pecuniary benefit.

Mr. Street looked keenly at him as he turned. He saw a tall, slender, good-looking young man; who, in manner at least, appeared to be somewhat indifferent, not to say haughty.

“A proud young dandy, who thinks the world’s made for him,” decided the lawyer in his inmost mind.

“In any profession, young sir?” asked Mr. Street.

“Not yet,” replied Charles. “I shall have, I expect, to go to college before thinking of one. If I think of one at all.”

“Better enter one,” said Mr. Street, shortly. “There’s no life so pleasant as one that has its regular occupation; no life so miserable as one of idleness.”

“And that’s true,” put in the Major. “Since I left the service, I’ve been like a fish out of water. Sometimes, before the day has well begun I wish it was ended, not knowing what to do with myself.”

“Not many weeks ago, Mrs. Atkinson was talking to me about that very thing, Major. She fancied you would have done better not to sell out.”

“Ay; I’ve said so myself. Poor Ann! Poor Ann! I should like to have seen more of her. But she had her crotchets, you know, Street. Did she suffer much at the last, I wonder?”

“No, she went off quite easily, like one who

was worn out. She is lying in the red room : I have been up to see her. A good woman ; but, as you observe, Major, crotchety on some points."

"Why, would you believe it, Street, she once thought of disinheriting me."

"I know it," replied the lawyer. "It was the year following her husband's death. And perhaps," he added, with as much of a smile as ever came near his lips, "you owe it to me that she did not do it."

"Indeed ! How was that ?"

"I received a letter from her, calling me down here for the purpose, she said, of altering her will. Away I came, bringing the will with me—for I held one copy of it, as you may remember, Major Raynor, and you the other. 'I want to disinherit my brother,' were the first words she said to me ; 'I shall leave Eagles' Nest to George Atkinson : I always wished him to have it.' Of course I asked her the why and the wherefore. 'Francis has affronted me, and he shall not inherit it,' was all the explanation I could get from her. Well, Major, I talked to her, and brought her into a more reasonable frame of mind : and the result was,

that I carried the original will back to town with me, untouched and unaltered."

"Poor Ann! poor Ann!" repeated the Major.

"About the arrangements?" resumed Mr. Street. "If I can be of any use to you, Major ——"

"Why, you can be of all the use," interrupted the Major. "I don't know how to manage anything."

Mr. Street had brought the will down with him to-day, and it was deemed right to open it at once. Major Raynor found that the recollection he had retained of its general contents was pretty accurate, save on one point. Eagles' Nest was left to him as it stood, with all its contents and appurtenances; and he was made residuary legatee: therefore, whatever moneys might have accumulated or been invested in shares, stock, and what not, would become his, after all claims and legacies were paid. The one point on which his memory had not served him, regarded the bequest to Frank Raynor. Instead of its being "among the thousands," as he had confidently believed, and led Frank to believe, it was only among the hundreds.

And not very high in them, either. Five hundred pounds. That was its amount ; neither more nor less. The Major looked at the amount ruefully.

“ I’m sure I can’t tell how I came to take up the notion that it was so much more, Charley, said he. “ I am very sorry. It will be a disappointment for Frank.”

“ But can’t you make it up to him, father?” suggested Charles. “ There must be a great deal of accumulated money, as Mr. Street says: you might spare Frank a little out of it.”

“ Why, to be sure I can,” heartily returned the Major, his eyes beaming. “ It did not strike me. But I should have thought of it myself, Charley, later.”

“ A great deal of accumulated money, regarding it from a moderate point of view,” spoke the lawyer, in confirmation. “ Mr. Timothy Atkinson left a fairish sum behind him, the interest upon which must have been accumulating until now. And his widow did not, I am sure, live up to anything like the revenues of this estate.”

“ What is it all invested in ?—where’s it lying ?” asked the Major.

“ We must see to that.”

“ But don’t you know ? ”

“ No. Mrs. Atkinson managed her monetary affairs herself, without reference to me. My brother knows all about everything, I daresay ; but he is, and always has been, as close as wax.”

“ Perhaps the money is deposited with him ? ”

“ I think not,” said the lawyer. “ I know he once, close though he is, said something to me to the effect that it was not. The securities for it, bonds and vouchers, and so forth, are no doubt lying in his hands.”

The funeral took place, Mr. Street again coming down for the ceremony. He was accompanied by his brother, Mr. Edwin Street. Dr. Raynor had declined the invitation sent him : he was not well enough to undertake the long journey ; and Frank could not be spared.

Some conversation occurred between the brothers, on the way down, about the above-mentioned securities ; but the banker at once said they were not deposited with him. In the after-part of the day, when the funeral was

over, Lawyer Street mentioned this to Major Raynor, and said they were no doubt "somewhere in the house."

A thorough search ensued: old Mrs. Atkinson's maid, an elderly and partially confidential attendant of many years, taking part in it. She showed them every possible place of security, locked and unlocked, in which such deeds could be placed. But no deeds were found.

"I still think they must be in your strong boxes at the bank," observed the lawyer to his brother, when he and Major Raynor returned to the room where they had left Mr. Edwin Street and Charles.

"But I assure you they are not," replied the banker, who bore a good deal of resemblance to his brother, and had the same cold manner. "When Mrs. Atkinson made her will, she lodged with us certain bonds of India Stock, just about sufficient to pay the legacies she bequeathed in that will when the time should come—as it now has come. She told me that she intended the stock to be applied to that purpose. We hold the bonds still; and the interest, which we have regularly

received for her, has been added to her current account with us : but we hold no other securities."

"What an odd thing!" cried the Major. "Where can they be?"

"When our second partner, Mr. Timothy Atkinson, died," continued the banker, "he left a certain sum in the bank to his wife's account, upon which she was to receive substantial interest. But about a year afterwards, I think it was, she withdrew this sum, and invested it elsewhere."

"Where? What in?"

"I cannot tell. I never knew. I understood from her that it was invested; but I knew no more. We have never had any money of hers since—except of course, the current account, paid in from the revenues of this estate. And we hold no securities of hers, besides these Indian bonds that I have spoken of.

"Was the sum she withdrew a large one?" asked the Major.

"It was between fourteen and fifteen thousand pounds."

"And she must have added ever so much to that," observed the lawyer. "She has not

lodged her superfluous income with you ? ” he added to his brother.

“ No. I have said so. We hold nothing but her current account. That has been replenished by her when necessary ; but we have had nothing more. It is certainly strange where the vouchers for her property can be. I suppose,” added the banker more slowly, “ that she did not invest the money in some bubble scheme, and lose it ? ”

“ The very same thought was crossing my mind,” spoke his brother.

“ But you don’t think that probable, do you, Street ? ” cried Major Raynor, turning rather hot.

A pause ensued. Lawyer Street was evidently thinking the probabilities out. They waited, and watched him.

“ I must confess that circumstances look suspicious,” he said at length. “ Else why so much secrecy ? ”

“ Secrecy ? ”

“ Yes. If Mrs. Atkinson placed the money in any well-known safe investment, why was she not open about it : get me to act for her, and lodge the securities at the bank ? She did

neither: she acted for herself—as we must suppose—and kept the transaction to herself. The inference is, that it was some wild-goose venture that she did not care to speak of. Women are *so* credulous.”

“What a gloomy look out!” put in the Major.

“Oh, well, we have only been glancing at possibilities, you know,” observed Mr. Street. “I dare say the securities will be found—and the money also.”

“Right, John,” assented the banker. “Had Mrs. Atkinson found her money was being lost, she would assuredly have set you to work to recover it. I think we may safely assume that much, Major Raynor!”

CHAPTER XVI.

UNEXPECTED COMMOTION.

“BE sure you stay until we return,” had been the charge left to Edina Raynor by her uncle. But the Major found himself detained longer than he had thought for, and she went away from Spring Lawn without again seeing him or Charles.

During the short period of her absence from Trennach—nine days—her father had changed so much for the worse that she started inwardly when she saw him. As he came out of his house to welcome her, all Edina’s pulses stood still for a moment, and then coursed onwards with a bound. In a gradual, wasting illness, not very apparent to the eyes around, it is only on such an occasion as this that its inroads can be judged of.

“Papa, you have been ill!”

“True, Edina, but I am mending somewhat now.”

“Why did you not send for me?”

“Nay, my dear, there was not any necessity.”

A substantial tea-table had been spread, and in a very few minutes Edina was presiding at it; her travelling things off, her soft brown hair smoothed, her countenance wearing its usual cheerful gravity. Not a gravity that repelled: one that insensibly attracted, for it spoke of its owner's truth, and faith, and earnestness, of her goodwill to all about her. Sitting there, dispensing her cups of tea to the Doctor and Frank, she was ready to hear the news of all that had transpired in the village during her absence.

Nearly the first item that greeted her was the stir about Josiah Bell, of which she had previously heard nothing. It had not subsided in the least, but rather increased: the man missing so long was now supposed to be lying in the deep shaft. But the supposition could only be traced back to a very insecure source indeed: nothing more than a dream of Mr. Blase Pellet's.

“A dream!” exclaimed Edina, in the midst of her listening wonder.

“So Pellet says,” replied Dr. Raynor.

“ But, papa, can there be any foundation for it? I mean for the fact, not the dream.”

“ The very question that we all asked when the rumour arose, Edina. At first it could not be traced to any source at all; there was the report, but whence it came seemed to be a mystery. One said, ‘ You told me;’ the other said, ‘ No, I heard it from you.’ At last, by dint of some close and patient investigation, chiefly on the part of the publican, Float, it was traced back to Blase Pellet, and he said he dreamt it.”

“ Then, after all, it has no foundation,” cried Edina.

“ None but that. I questioned Pellet myself, asking him how he came to spread such a report. He replied that he did not spread the report that Bell was lying there, only that he dreamt he was.”

“ I should have thought Blase Pellet a very unlikely man to have dreams, papa, and to tell them.”

“ So should I,” assented the Doctor in a significant tone. “ So unlikely, that I cannot help suspecting he did not have this one.”

Frank Raynor, who had risen to stand at the

window, as if attracted by something in the street, turned his head half round at this remark, but immediately turned it back again. Edina looked inquiringly at her father.

“I could not help fancying, as I listened to him, that Pellet was saying it for some purpose,” observed the Doctor. “His manner was peculiar. If I may so describe it—shuffling.”

“I scarcely understand you, papa. You think he did not have the dream? That he only said he had it; and said it for a purpose?”

“Just so, Edina.”

“But what could be his purpose?”

“Ah, there I am at fault. We may discover later. If he did say it with a purpose, I conclude it will not end here.”

“Well, it sounds rather strange altogether,” observed Edina. “Frank, do you mean to let your tea get quite cold?”

Frank Raynor returned to his place at the table. He drank his tea, but declined to eat, and began to speak of Mrs. Atkinson’s will.

“Did you hear any particulars about it, Edina?”

“No,” replied Edina. “Except the one fact

that she did not make a second will, There were doubts upon the point, you know."

"Uncle Francis never entertained any doubt of it, Edina; and he was the best judge, I think, of what his sister would or would not do. I am very glad though, for his and Charley's sake."

"For all their sakes," added Edina.

"I rather wonder we have not heard from him," resumed Frank. "The funeral took place three or four days ago."

"You were not able to go to it, papa?" said Edina.

"No, child. Neither could Frank be spared. It would have taken three days, you see, to go and return comfortably."

Rising from the tea table as soon as he could make a decent excuse for it, for he had no business calls on his time this evening, Frank set off on his usual walk to the Mount. On five evenings, since Edina left, had he so gone; but never with any success: not once had Daisy come out to him. She was being watched closer than ever.

"And I suppose I shall have my walk for nothing this evening also!" thought Frank, as

he plucked a wild rose from one of the fragrant roadside hedges. "This shall not go on long : but I should like to present myself to Mrs. St. Clare with an assured sum in hand to start us in life. I wonder Uncle Francis does not write ! He must know I am anxious—if he thinks about it. Up to his ears in his new interests, he forgets other people's."

Fortune favoured Frank this evening. As he approached the outer gate of the Mount, he saw Daisy standing at it, very much to his surprise.

"Mamma's lawyer has come over on business, and she is shut up with him," began Daisy, her eyes dancing with delight. "She told me to go to Lydia. But Lydia is asleep, and I came out here."

"I have wanted to see you so much, Daisy," said Frank, as he gave her his arm, and they turned off under the broad elm trees. "My aunt, Mrs. Atkinson, is dead."

"We saw it in the papers," answered Daisy.

"It is from her that I expect money, you know. Every day I look for a letter from my Uncle Francis, telling me what sum it is that I inherit. And then I shall present myself to

your mother. I have so longed to tell you this."

"I have longed to see you," returned Daisy, her pulses beating wildly with various and very mixed feelings, her face flushing and paling. "I—I—I want to ask you something, Frank."

"Ask away, my love," was his reply. But he noticed her emotion.

"Perhaps you will not answer me?"

"Indeed I will, Daisy. Why not?"

"It is about—Rosaline Bell." She could scarcely get the words out for agitation.

Frank was startled. It was quite evident that he was unprepared for any such topic. It seemed to *frighten* him. Else why that sudden change of countenance, that sudden drop of Daisy's arm? Her heart fell.

"What of her?" asked Frank, quite sharply. For in truth he believed Daisy was about to question him, not of Rosaline herself, but of that mysterious rumour connected with her father and the Bottomless Shaft; and it grated terribly on all his nerves.

"I see it is true," gasped Daisy. "Oh! why did you marry *me*?"

“What is true?” returned Frank, unpleasantly agitated.

“That you—that you—were fond of Rosaline Bell. You loved her all along. Before you loved me!”

The charge was so very different from what he had been fearing, that Frank felt for the moment bewildered: bewildered in the midst of his inexpressible relief. He stood still, turned Daisy so that she faced him, and gazed into her eyes.

“*What* is that you say, my dear? I really do not understand.”

Daisy shook and shivered, but did not speak.

“That I love Rosaline Bell? I never loved her. What in the name of wonder put such an idea into your head?”

For answer Daisy burst into tears. “She—she was so beautiful!”

“Beautiful! Of course she is beautiful. And I admired her beauty, Daisy, if it comes to that, as much as other people did. But as to loving Rosaline Bell, that is a mistake. I never felt a spark of love for her. What a goose you must be, Daisy!—And why on earth should you have taken up the fancy just now?”

Daisy sobbed too much to answer. She nearly believed what he said, for no doubt lay in his earnest tone, and suffered herself to be soothed. She would have quite believed it but for Frank's signs of discomfiture at the introduction of the girl's name. Frank held her to him as they walked underneath the trees, and kissed her tear-stained face from time to time.

“You need not doubt my love, Daisy. That at least is yours.”

They parted more hopefully than usual, for Frank assured her it could not be above a day or two ere he claimed her openly; and Daisy felt that she might believe him in all respects; and she resolutely flung her jealousy to the winds.

“Fare you well, my darling. A short while now—we may count it by the hours—and this tantalizing life will be over.”

He went home by way of the Bare Plain. And by so doing—and it was not very often now he chose that route—fell into an adventure he had not bargained for. Round and about the Bottomless Shaft had collected a great crowd of men: who were making much commotion.

It appeared that the rumours, touching Josiah Bell, had this night reached what might be called a climax. Miners had gone off from various quarters to the alleged scene of Mr. Blase's dream, and were plunging into the mystery *con amore*. As many as could press around the pit's mouth were holding on to one another for safety and hanging dangerously over it: as if by that means they could solve the problem of who and what might be lying within its depths. Others stood at a distance, making free comments, momentarily taking their pipes out of mouth to speak. Mrs. Bell, getting to hear of the stir, had tied a white-spotted yellow silk square (once Josiah's Sunday-going handkerchief) over her cap, and come out to make one of the throng. It was a very light and hot night, daylight scarcely gone, and the western sky bright with a pale amber. The rugged faces of the miners and the red glow from their pipes, coupled with the commotion that stirred them, made a strange scene.

"Are you here, Mrs. Bell!" cried Frank, as he discerned her on the outskirts of the crowd. "What is it that is the matter?"

"There's nothing the matter," interposed

Blase Pellet. And Frank turned on his heel to face the speaker in the moment's impulse, for he had not known that he was there. "What the plague all the town has come out for like this, I can't think. Let them mind their own business."

"But we consider that it is our business, don't you see, Blase," put in Andrew Float in his civil way. "Our poor vanished soe is either lying down there in aal they stones and ashes, or he is not; and we'd like to make sure which it be."

"Well, then, he is *not*," returned Blase: and he disappeared amid the throng.

"Has anything fresh arisen?" inquired a quiet voice at this juncture—that of Dr. Raynor—addressing both Frank and Mrs. Bell, who were standing side by side. The Doctor, observing from his window a great number of people, evidently in excitement, making for the Bare Plain, had come forth himself to learn what the movement meant.

"I can't find out that there's anything fresh, sir," was the dame's answer. "Amid such confusion one don't easily get to the bottom of things. Andrew Float says 'twas just a thought

that took a few of 'em as they sat talking of Bell at the Golden Shaft—that they'd come off and have a look down the pit's mouth ; and the news spread, and others collected and followed. But I'd hardly think anything so simple could have brought all these."

"They must have had some reason for coming," remarked the Doctor, gazing at the ever-increasing crowd.

"Blase Pellet has just said there is no reason," rejoined Frank. "I should advise you not to stand out here long," he added, to Mrs. Bell.

"Blase Pellet's nobody to go by : he'll say one thing to-day, and another to-morrow," rejoined Dame Bell ; as she turned on the path that led to her home ; they turning with her.

"I think the dreams, that he says he has, are not much to go by," observed Dr. Raynor quietly.

"Oh, but that dream was," said Dame Bell. "And I've never had a good night's rest, sir, since I heard it, and that's more than a week ago. I can't get to sleep at night for thinking of it."

"I am sorry to hear you say so, Mrs.

Bell: I thought you possessed better sense. Pellet must have been very foolish to tell you of it."

" 'Twasn't him that did tell me, Dr. Raynor. Leastways, not off-hand. It was Nancy Tomson. She come into my place one morning, sir, when I was down on my knees after breakfast whiten-
ing the hearth-flag; and I saw how scared her face looked. 'Guess what they be saying now,' says she to me: 'they've got a tale that your husband is lying in the Bottomless Shaft.' Well, sir, I stared at her, sitting back, as I knelt, with the piece of stone in my hand: for you see I thought she meant he was lying there asleep; I thought no worse. 'Go along with you, Nancy,' says I; 'as if Bell would lay himself down to sleep near that shaft!' 'Oh, it's not near it, but *in* it,' says she; 'and it's not sleeping he is, but dead. Anyway,' she goes on, seeing I didn't believe her, 'it's what they men be saying.' Well, Doctor, though I found every soul in the place saying the same thing, for four-and-twenty hours I could not get to learn why they said it. Andrew Float told me at last. He said it was through a dream of Blase Pellet's."

Dr. Raynor, listening attentively, made no comment.

“I got Pellet before me, sir, and he made a clean breast of it. He had not intended to let me know it, he said—and I don’t think he had; but I did know it, and so it was no use his holding out. It was a dreadful dream, he said. He had seen my poor husband lying at the bottom of that deep shaft, dead: seen him as plain as he had ever seen anything in all his life. When he woke up, he was all in a hot horror, his hair standing on end.”

“Ah,” said the Doctor quietly, his tone one of utter disbelief, though Mrs. Bell did not detect it. “Did he intimate, pray, how long Bell had been lying there?”

“It was just what I asked him, sir, when I could get my breath together. A good three months, he was sure, he said. Which must have brought it back, sir, you see, to the time he disappeared.”

“Yes, I do see,” observed the Doctor, rather pointedly. “Well, I do not put any faith in dreams, Mrs. Bell, and I would advise you not to put any. Good night. Get indoors as soon as you can.”

Dr. Raynor turned homewards, making a circuit to avoid the throng. Frank began whistling softly to himself, as a man sometimes does when absorbed in thought.

“What is your opinion of this, Frank?” asked the Doctor, abruptly.

“I can form none, sir. Why they should collect ——”

“Not that,” interrupted the Doctor. “One fool makes many. I spoke of Blase Pellet’s alleged dream. I, myself, believe he had nothing of the kind: his manner, when I spoke with him about it, was not satisfactory: but what puzzles me is, his motive for saying that he had the dream. Some men are gifted with a propensity for astounding their fellow-creatures with marvellous tales. To create a sensation they’d say they have been hung, drawn, quartered, and brought to life again. But Pellet is not one of these; he is quiet, reticent, and practical.”

Frank made no answering observation. They were nearly abreast now of the Bottomless Shaft, and of the crowd surging around it.

“I could almost think that he *knows* Bell is in there,” resumed the Doctor, dropping his

voice. "That he must have been privy to the accident—if it was an accident—that sent poor Bell down. Perhaps took part in it ——"

"Oh no, no!" incautiously spoke Frank. "It is not likely he would take part in anything of the kind, Uncle Hugh," he added, in a quieter tone.

"If I don't quite think it, it is because there are one or two stumbling-blocks in the way," went on Dr. Raynor with composure, and paying no heed to the interruption. "Had Pellet been a witness to any accident—any false slip of Bell's, for instance, on the edge of the pit—he would have spoken of it at the time. Had he taken any part in it—madvertently, of course, Pellet would not do so willingly—and hushed it up, he would not be likely to invent a dream now, and so draw attention again to what had nearly died away. Nevertheless, I am sure there is something or other in this new stir of Mr. Pellet's that does not appear on the surface."

Dr. Raynor quitted the subject, to the intense relief of his nephew; took off his hat in the warm night, and began to talk of the

evening star, shining before them in all its brilliancy.

“A little while, Frank, a few more poor weeks, or months, or years, as may be, given to the fret and tare of this earthly life, and we shall, I suppose, know what these stars are; shall have entered on our heavenly life hereafter.”

Major Raynor's expected letter came to Frank on the following morning. As he opened it, a bank-note for £20 dropped out: which the generous-hearted Major had sent as an earnest of his goodwill.

“MY DEAR BOY,—I am sorry to have to tell you that the legacy left you by your Aunt Ann is only five hundred pounds. I confess that I thought it would have turned out to be at least three thousand. Of course I shall make it up to you. We cannot yet put our hands upon the securities for the accumulated money; but as soon as we do so, you shall have a cheque from me for three thousand pounds.

“I hope my brother is better, and Edina

well. I wish she could be at Spring Lawn to help in the packing up, and all the rest of it. They come up to Eagles' Nest next week : and how they will get away without Edina to start them, I cannot think. My best affection to all.

“ Ever your attached uncle,

“ FRANCIS RAYNOR.”

“ I wonder how it is,” mused Frank, as he slowly folded the letter, “ that in all our needs and necessities and troubles, we instinctively turn to Edina ? ”

CHAPTER XVII.

BROUGHT TO THE SURFACE.

THE Reverend Titus Backup, in charge just now of the spiritual welfare of Trennach, had read out the banns of marriage on three separate Sundays, between Aaron Pitt, bachelor, and Naomi Perkins, spinster. On the Monday morning following the last announcement, Aaron, who was a young miner, and Naomi, who was nothing at all, and not good for much, either, in the shape of usefulness, presented themselves at the church with their respective friends, for the purpose of being united.

This was the second marriage ceremony that Mr. Backup had had to perform since his sojourn at Trennach. He got through it pretty much as he had the first: namely, with a good deal of inward doubt and hesitation, but successfully as to the result; inasmuch as he was able, at the conclusion, to

pronounce the couple man and wife, without having broken down.

Clerk Trim was present, flourishing in all the importance of his office. Mrs. Trim also. Being on terms of social intimacy with the parties in private life, Mrs. Trim had smartened herself up, and stepped into the church to look on, making one with the rest at the altar rails. After the ceremony, came the business in the vestry. Trim got out the register book, and was opening it to place it before Mr. Backup, when a fresh entry in it caught his eye. The clerk knew every page of the register as well as he knew his own Sunday shoes: which were made after the fashion of pumps, with big ties of black ribbon in front.

“Mercy upon us!” cried he in his astonishment. “Here’s a new marriage wrote down!”

The exclamation caused the party to gather round him. Mr. Backup, remembering the circumstances of the marriage, and that he himself was in the well-preserved secret, turned nervous at once.

“Why, it’s—it’s—it’s Mr. Frank Raynor!” went on the clerk, staring at the page, and

mastering its revelations but slowly in his consternation. "And Miss—Miss—Well, if ever I was so struck in my life! Did you marry them, sir?" holding out the book to the parson. "Is that your reverence's own signature?"

His reverence took the book, muttered something quite foreign to the subject, that nobody in the world could hear distinctly, himself included, and proceeded to enter the present marriage. As it was upon the same page, the parties signing it after him had the satisfaction of gratifying their own curiosity; and read, plainly as ink could show it, the names of Francis Raynor and Margaret St. Clare.

Now, had Clerk Trim been haply alone when he made this discovery, he, being a reticent and prudent man, would probably have kept the news to himself. But unfortunately he was not alone. Six or eight people were present, not counting the parson; and, half of them being females, the reader may be left to judge what chance there was of its being kept.

The first to spread it abroad was Mrs. Trim. The wedding company having dispersed — without any invitation to her to

accompany them to the house of the bride's mother and partake of the feasting, of which she had cherished some slight hope—Mary Trim betook herself to Float the druggist's. She had no particular work on hand that morning, and thought she could not do better than consecrate it to gossip. Mrs. Float, who was so far an invalid as that she was unable to do much for herself, having been crippled years ago, especially in the hands, by an attack of rheumatic fever, was in her usual chair by the fireside in the small parlour behind the shop, and Blase Pellet was pouring out some hot milk for her. Let the weather be ever so warm, Mrs. Float would not go without her bit of fire: and perhaps she needed it. She was a stout, easy woman, who took the best and the worst sides of life with equal calmness; even her husband's attachment to the Golden Shaft. Of Blase Pellet she was very fond: for he was ever ready to render her little services, as he might to a mother. Blase Pellet had his good and his bad qualities—as most people have: it was chiefly on the subject of Rosaline Bell that he was crazed.

“ I’ll do that,” said Mary Trim, taking the warming-can from him. “ You are wanted in the shop, Mr. Pellet. A customer followed me in.”

Putting the can within the fender, she gave the cup of milk to Mrs. Float; and at the same time regaled her with an account of the discovery in the register. Mrs. Float, holding the cup to her mouth with her feeble hands, listened and stared, and for once felt some surprise; while Blase Pellet, behind the left-hand counter, changing one volume for another, caught a word here and there.

“ What’s that you have been saying about Mr. Raynor?” he demanded, reappearing before Mrs. Trim, after despatching the book-changer. “ I don’t believe a word of it.”

“ Then you can disbelieve it,” was the tart retort; for Mrs. Trim did not like cold water to be thrown upon her assertions. “ Mr. Baackup himself maarried him: there’s hes reverence’s own name writ down to the wedding.”

“ Married him to Miss St. Clare?”

“ To Miss Margaret St. Clare. That’s the pretty one. Don’t you go disputing a body’s word again, Blase Pellet. Fact es fact. Did

you suppose they'd write down a lie? They registers 'ud be pewerly ticklish consarns to sarve out in thaat form."

A knocking at the other counter with some copper money, and a calling out of "shop" in fierce and impatient tones, summoned Mr. Blase away again. This time he was wanted to make up a complicated prescription for hair oil; comprising various choice ingredients. While he was doing it, his thoughts ran in so deep a groove that he scented it with oil of turpentine instead of bergamotte. And when the purchaser complained, Mr. Blase, after sniffing and looking, and finding out what he had done, being unable to alter it, protested that it was a new scent for the hair just come down from London.

"What a great fool I have been!" ran his reflections. "If it is Miss St. Clare that he has been in love with—and married her, too, in secret—it can't have been Rosaline Bell: and when Rosaline said, poor girl, that there was nothing between them, she must have told the truth. And there I've been and gone and stirred up all this blessed commotion about the old man!—and who is to know whether I shall be able to lay it?"

At any rate, Mr. Blase Pellet tried to “lay” it. He went forth at once, and earnestly assured everybody who would listen to him, that he found he had been mistaken in fancying he had had the dream.

It chanced that on this same Monday morning, Frank Raynor was about to take his departure for London. Whatever disorder it might be that was seizing hold of Dr. Raynor, one thing was certain—that it fluctuated greatly. And though but a few days had elapsed since the return of Edina, he had so visibly improved, both in appearance and in strength, that she thought he was getting well: and Frank felt less scruple in quitting him.

Frank, in his sanguine way, believed he had only to go to London to drop into some good thing; that the one and the other would be, as it were, a simultaneous process. On the spot one can do anything, he observed, when discussing the point with Dr. Raynor. Dr. Raynor did not oppose his going. Rather the contrary. If Frank went at all, now was the best time: for he knew that this spurt of health in himself, this renewed capability of exertion, would not

last. For a time it might ; not for ever. During his stay in London, Frank was to look out for, and engage, an assistant for his uncle ; a qualified medical man, who might become the partner of Dr. Raynor, and might eventually succeed to his practice. In short, it was just the same kind of thing that Frank was hoping to find for himself with some first-rate medical man in London.

On the previous day, when the congregation was pouring out of church, after Mr. Backup's sermon, Frank and Daisy had contrived to exchange a few words, under cover of the crowd around. He told her that he was at length starting for town ; and should only come back to claim her. It might be in a week's time— if he were fortunate and found what he wanted at once ; or it might be a fortnight. Longer than that it could not be ; for his uncle had given that as the extreme limit of his absence. Daisy returned the brief pressure of his hand, which he managed to give unseen, and glanced at him with her bright eyes, that had a whole sea of hope waving in their depths. The world looked very fair to them ; and they felt that they had need of patience to endure this en-

forced separation before they might enter on its enjoyment together.

On that same Sunday, in the evening, Dr. Raynor spoke finally to Frank. They were sitting together, talking of this approaching sojourn in town: and of the great things it was to accomplish.

“Frank,” said the Doctor, arousing himself from a reverie, “has it ever occurred to you to think that in carrying out the idea of settling in London, you may be throwing away the substance for the shadow?”

Frank Raynor’s gay blue eyes took a wondering expression as they went out to the speaker. He did not catch the drift of the words.

“In what way, Uncle Hugh?”

“It seems to me that the very thing you are about to seek there is lying ready to your hand here.”

Frank understood now. “You mean that I should remain with you, Uncle Hugh?”

“Yes. As my partner now, Frank. As my successor hereafter.”

Frank Raynor slightly shook his head to imply dissent, but made no other answer.

“I say to you, Frank, what I would say to

no one else : that the time before some one must succeed to my place and practice is growing limited. It may be but a few weeks ; it may be a few months : more than twelve months I do not think it can be. If ——”

“ Oh, Uncle Hugh ! ”

“ Let me finish. I know I have your sympathy, my boy, and your best wishes, but all the sympathy and the good wishes in the world cannot alter the fiat which I fear has gone forth. Hear me, Frank. This has become a good practice now : it is a thousand pities that you should reject it and let it fall to the lot of a stranger.”

“ But, if I get a better practice than this in London, Uncle Hugh ? ” he argued. “ I mean, a more lucrative one.”

“ But that is an uncertainty.”

“ Not much of an uncertainty,” said sanguine Frank.

“ At any rate, you will have to pay for it. Pay in proportion to its eligibility.”

“ Of course. But I can do that. Uncle Francis is going to make up my legacy to three thousand pounds, you know.”

“ I know that he says so.”

“ But—you *can't* doubt his word ! ” cried Frank, his eyes lifted again in genuine amazement.

“ Not his word, Frank: no, nor his intention: both are good and honest as the day's bright. I only doubt his power.”

“ His power ! What, with all that accumulated money just dropped into his hands ! ”

“ But it has not yet dropped into them. It seems that a doubt exists where the money is, or whether there is any to drop.”

“ Oh, Uncle Hugh, it is sure to be found. I daresay it has already turned up.”

“ Well, I hope it has, Frank, and that you will reap the benefit you expect. Let it pass so. Still you must spend the money to ensure a practice ; and the practice may not turn out to be as lucrative as you shall be led to expect. The practice here is sure ; you need not spend your money to secure it ; and in a brief space of time, a little sooner or a little later, it will be all in your hands.”

“ Uncle Hugh, you are very generous, very thoughtful for me ; but indeed I could not settle at Trennach. There are reasons ——”

Frank pulled himself up hastily. He was going on to say that for certain reasons this one small spot, on all the length and breadth of the world's surface, was barred to him. Rather would he pass his life on some rocky desert unfrequented by man, than within sight and sound of the Bare Plain.

"I do not like Trennach," he went on. "I could not stay here. For the last two or three months," he added in his candour, "I have been as restless as can be, wanting to get away from it."

"You want to be amid a more civilised community than these miners make," said the Doctor, good-naturedly.

"Well—yes, Uncle Hugh. I do—when one is setting up for life."

"Then there's no more to be said," concluded Dr. Raynor.

So Frank held to his plan and his journey, and was this morning starting in pursuance of it. Never again, as he hoped, should he be staying at Trennach. Just a few days, as it was arranged, he would remain to introduce the new doctor—who would probably come down when he did—to people and places ; and

then he would bid it farewell for ever, carrying Daisy with him.

Taking leave of his uncle and Edina, he set off to walk to the station, his light overcoat thrown back from his shoulders, and greeting everyone he met with a kindly word and a gay smile. The sky overhead was blue, calm, lovely, giving promise that the day would be fair to its end; just as Frank's hopeful heart seemed to give token that his life's journey would be fair throughout its course.

“Good morning, Mr. Raynor.”

The salutation came from the young parson. He stood leaning on the stile of the Rectory garden, which overlooked the high road. Frank, answering cordially, was intending to pass onwards. But Mr. Backup made a motion to retard him.

“I am off to London,” said Frank, gaily. “Can I do anything for you?”

“I will not detain you a moment; I want to say just a word,” spoke the clergyman, feeling already uncommonly shy and nervous at the thought of what that word was. “Mr. Raynor, I—I—I beg you to believe that I have

implicitly kept secret that—that matter which you requested me to keep. But ——”

“I know you have,” cried Frank, extending his hand to the parson in token of gratitude, “and I thank you heartily. Not a soul knows of it.”

“But—I was about to say that I fear it is a secret no longer. Another wedding took place in the church this morning, and the clerk read the entry of yours. Other people read it. They saw it when they signed the book.”

The information was just about as complete a damper for Frank Raynor as could well have been administered to him. He stood perfectly still, his lips settling into a grave expression. Not that Frank much cared for the transpiring of the fact in itself: he had thought lately that if it did transpire, it might be a stroke of good luck for him, by giving him Daisy—kept from him in a prison until now. But what struck him was, that if this were true, it would stop his journey to London. Instead of going thither, he must bend his steps to the Mount; for he could not leave Daisy¹ alone to bear the brunt of the discovery.

“I knew Aaron Pitt was to be married this

morning, but I declare I never gave a thought to the register," spoke he aloud. "They did see it, you say. Did they make any comment?"

"Some comments were made. Clerk Trim was so much surprised that he called out to know whether it was really my signature, and whether I married you. It crossed my mind to say you did not wish it talked of just at present, and to beg them to keep it secret. But as so many people were there I thought it would be quite useless."

"Quite useless," decided Frank. "Well, this has come upon me unexpectedly, and—and it will change my immediate plans. I must go to the Mount now, instead of to the station."

"I am very sorry," began the clergyman, as nervously as though it were through some fault of his. "There are not two registers, you see, Mr. Raynor, and ——"

"Oh, don't be sorry," interrupted Frank, recovering his spirits and his lightness of tone and heart. "I'm not sure but it may turn out for the best. Upon my return from London, a few days hence, I was going to declare it myself."

Shaking the parson's hand warmly, Frank continued his way, striding over the ground at a great rate. Instead of branching off at the turning that led to the railway, he strode straight onwards towards the Mount.

"All for the best," he repeated to himself, referring to his parting words to Mr. Backup. "It may end in my taking Daisy up with me to-day. It shall end so, if my will is worth anything."

Boldly went he to the Mount, knocking and ringing with a free hand. Far from feeling small for having (so to say) run away with the prettiest daughter of the house, for which feat he might expect reproach and obloquy, he seemed to think he had come on some errand that merited reward. One of the men-servants flung open the door.

"Can I see Mrs. St. Clare?"

"Mrs. St. Clare is not at home, sir."

"Indeed!" returned Frank in surprise. For it was not her habit to go out so early.

"My mistress and the young ladies have left home this morning, sir," explained the man. "They are gone for a week or so."

"Where to?"

“ I don’t know, sir. It was uncertain. Perhaps as far as Malvern : Miss Lydia likes Malvern : or perhaps only to one of the sea-side places on this coast.”

“ You cannot tell me where a letter would find Mrs. St. Clare ? ”

“ No, sir. My mistress said that all letters might wait here until she came back.”

So there was no help for it : he could not make the communication to Mrs. St. Clare. But in all probability she would hear nothing of the news before her return. Daisy would be sure to write to him, and Edina had been requested to forward his letters to town.

“ It must have been rather a sudden thought of Mrs. St. Clare’s, this going from home : was it not ? ”

“ Quite so, sir. It was Miss Lydia who started it, while the ladies were sitting in the drawing-room yesterday afternoon. Tabitha never heard a word about packing up, sir, till she was at her tea.”

Frank looked at his watch. There might be still time to catch his train if he started for the station at the rate of a steam-engine. He set off ; and just accomplished it. But that he

did so was owing to the fact that the train, as usual, came up considerably behind its time.

It is a great deal easier in this world to raise a storm than to allay one: and so Mr. Blase Pellet found to his cost. He had thoroughly aroused the public mind on the subject of the missing miner, Bell; and the public mind refused to be calmed again.

Day by day, since the discovery in the register, did the astounding news of Frank's private marriage make a deeper impression upon Blase Pellet. He saw things now, looking back, with very different eyes from what he had formerly seen them. He told himself that Rosaline's version of her intimacy with Mr. Raynor—namely, that it was no particular intimacy, and had nothing hidden beneath its surface—was the truth. The relief to himself was wonderfully great: all his love for her, that he had been angrily trying to repress, increased tenfold: and he began to see that the love might indeed come to fruition. At least, that if it did not, the fault would lie in his own insensate folly. If he could but stop this commotion about Bell, so that the man

might rest where he was, undiscovered, he should make his way with Rosaline. But the public seemed anything but inclined to let it stop : and Blase Pellet gave many a mentally-breathed hard word to the said public. Just at present Trennach appeared to have nothing to do but go about suggesting disagreeable surmises.

One story led to a second ; one supposition to another. From the first startling rumour, that Bell might be lying at the bottom of the shaft (as shown to Mr. Pellet in a remarkable dream), Trennach passed on to believe that he was there ; and, next, to say that he must be searched for.

In vain Blase Pellet, mortified, agitated, and repentant, sought to prove that Bell was not there ; that no foundation could exist for the notion ; that he was now fully convinced his dream had not been a dream at all, but a baseless fabric of a fancy. Trennach did not listen to him. Excitement had gone too far for that. It was just possible, of course, that poor Bell might not be in the pit ; but they thought he *was* ; and, at any rate, they meant to see. As simple-minded, well-meaning

Andrew Float expressed it: "Dreams didna come for nought." Blase Pellet could have bitten out his false tongue. How easy the future would now have seemed but for this storm! Frank Raynor removed from his path by marriage, his own success with Rosaline could only be a question of time: but if this stir, which he had invoked, could not be stilled, and it went on to any discovery, Rosaline would probably make it an excuse for throwing him off for ever. That it would in any case grieve and anger her frightfully, and that she would detect the falsity of his "dream," he knew by instinct; and Blase felt tempted to wish he had been born dumb.

When we put ourselves out of the way to delude the world from motives of self-interest, and do it, moreover, by a lie, the chances are that the step recoils unpleasantly upon ourselves. In some way or other we get repaid in our own coin. It may not be quite immediately; it may not be for years to come; but, rely upon it, it does come home to us sooner or later. We see the blind folly we were guilty of (not to speak of the sin), and we cry out in our flood-tide of repentance, Oh, that I had not

quitted the straightforward path ! As Blase Pellet was crying now.

The owner of the land, one of those mine-owners whose wealth is something fabulous, became interested in the case. He came forward, and gave orders that the deep pit should be examined, to see whether or not the missing man was there. The necessary machinery was soon brought into requisition—where wealth commands, difficulties are made easy—and the Bottomless Shaft was searched.

Yes. Josiah Bell was brought up to the surface. His attire was recognised as that which he had worn the day of his disappearance : and there remained no doubt that he had met his death that same night by falling down the pit.

Amid powerful commotion, an inquest was called. Of course the question now was, how had he got down : a question that puzzled his friends and the world. For it was a fact well known that Bell gave way to superstitious fancies, and would not be likely to go near the shaft alone at night.

But no evidence came forward that could throw light on the mystery. Those who had

seen him last in life—the pitmen with whom he had been drinking at the Golden Shaft, and his wife at home, who had been the last person, so far as was known, to exchange speech with him—told what they had to tell. Their testimony amounted to nothing. Neither, for the matter of that, did Mr. Blase Pellet's. Very much to his inward dismay, Mr. Pellet was summoned as a witness, and was sharply questioned about his dream by the coroner.

And Blase, in sheer helplessness and some terror, took up the dream again; the dream which he had been seeking lately to repudiate. No other course, than to take it up, seemed open to him, now that matters had come to this pass, and Bell had been actually found. If he disowned the dream, the next inquiry would be, How then did you come to know anything of the matter: what told you that the man was lying there? So, with a clouded face, and voice uneasy, Mr. Blase gave the history of his dream: and when asked by a juryman why he had gone about lately protesting that he was sure he had not had any dream, he replied that, seeing the public were growing so excited, he had deemed it better to disavow it,

thinking it might calm them. The coroner, who seemed to be unfortunately sceptical as to dreams in general, eyed the witness keenly, and made him repeat the dream—at least what he remembered of it—three times over. Blase declared he had never been able to recollect much of it, except the fact that he had seen Bell lying at the foot of the pit, dead. And then he had awakened in a state of inconceivable fright.

“Had you any animosity against the deceased during his life?” questioned the coroner, still regarding the witness intently.

“Oh dear no, sir,” returned Blase. “We never had a mis-word in our lives, but were always the best of friends. He was a kind of relation of mine. At least his wife is.”

That no animosity had existed between them could be testified to by the community in general, as the coroner found. He was looking at Blase still.

“And you positively state, young man, that you had no grounds whatever, except this dream, for suspecting or knowing that the deceased was down the shaft?”

Blase coughed. “None.”

“ You do not know how he got down ? ”

“ Good gracious ! I know ! Not I, sir.”

Blase had answered readily, save for the short cough, and with much appearance of earnestness. The coroner was conscious of some dim doubts of Mr. Blase Pellet's strict veracity, that were floating in his own mind, arising chiefly from his incredulity as to dreams ; but the doubts were not sufficient to act upon, neither did he perceive that they could be in any way supported. So he released the witness. And the inquest came to an end, the jury returning an open verdict.

That Josiah Bell met his death through falling down the pit ; but that what caused his fall, there was no evidence to show.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DANGEROUS ENEMY.

“**H**E never went near that pit of his own free will ! He was lured to its edge and flung into it. Or else he was killed outright, and put down there afterwards out of the way.”

The speaker was Mrs. Bell : who had at last assumed the widow's dress and cap. Her audience consisted of her daughter Rosaline, the Aunt Pellet from Falmouth, Blase Pellet, and two or three of the neighbours. The aunt and Rosaline had arrived from Falmouth to attend the funeral. Rosaline, at first, had absolutely refused to come ; she “felt afraid,” she said, with much trembling and many bitter tears ; she did not like to look upon the dead, even though it was her poor father : and she was too ill to travel besides. But John Pellet and his wife over-ruled these objections : they told her it was an “unnatural state of feeling,”

one that she might not indulge : and the aunt, who was coming to Trennach herself, brought Rosaline with her, partly by over-persuasion, partly by force.

Her plea of illness might indeed have been allowed. Thin, white, worn, with a shrinking manner that seemed to be always starting at shadows, Rosaline looked little like the gay and blooming girl once known to Trennach. Trennach gazed at her with amazed eyes, wondering what Falmouth could have done to her in that short period, or whether the Seven Whistlers, which had so startled her at home, could have followed her to that populous town. Sitting here in her mother's kitchen, her back to the light, her cheek resting on her hand, Rosaline listened in silence to the conversation, two people amid the company especially regarding her—Blase Pellet and Nancy Tomson. Nancy openly avowed that she had never seen any young woman so changed in all her life ; while Blase Pellet, though mentally acknowledging the change, was drinking in draughts of her wondrous beauty.

“ No men living have, as a body, queerer fancies than miners, especially these Cornish

miners: and poor Josiah, though he was not Cornish at all, as we well know, had his," pursued Dame Bell, chiefly addressing her sister, a tall, thin woman, who had arrived fashionably attired in crape and bombazine, with a veil to her bonnet. Not that she had her bonnet on now, for this was the morning afterwards, and the day of the funeral.

"There's hardly a man about here that would venture close up alone to that shaft at night: and if you go out and ask 'em one by one, Sarah, you'll find I am telling you nothing but the truth," continued the widow, pursuing her argument. "Since Dan Sandon threw himself headlong in, and was killed, the men won't go near it for fear of seeing him. Neither would Bell; and he'd no more go up to that pit's mouth by himself at night, I say, than he'd——"

"Perhaps he fell down it accidentally, Ann," interrupted Mrs. Pellet.

"I don't say but what he might. If he was on its brink, looking down, or anything of that, he might have overbalanced himself. But I do say that he was not there alone. I ask what took him to it at all; and I ask who was with him?"

Pertinent questions, both. Rosaline, chancing to look up, met the gaze of Blase Pellet. Each started slightly, and dropped their eyes, as though to look at one another were a crime.

“ Let us put it down as being an accident; for argument’s sake,” urged the widow. “ That he was too near the pit’s mouth, and fell in. It might have been so. But in that case, I repeat, he was not there alone. Some one man, at least, must have been with him—perhaps more than one. Why did he (or they) not give an alarm? Why did he not run away from the pit, and say, ‘ Poor Bell has fallen down that shaft, and what’s to be done?’ Come, can any of you answer me that?”

“ Well, it stands to reason that that’s what anybody would do,” observed Mrs. Pellet. “ But who was it that was with him?”

“ There es not waun o’ tha men owns to it,” put in Nancy Tomson. “ What should heve taaken ’em up to that there ghashly shaaft at night, they aal ask; or Bell either?”

“ No, not one owns to it: and, as far as I can see, there was nothing to take ’em there,” assented Mrs. Bell. “ Therefore I say it was no accident. Bell was just carried there, dead

or alive, as might be, and put away out o' sight."

"What shall you do about it?" asked Mrs. Pellet, in a scared tone.

"What can I do but wait? Wait till some disclosure turns up."

"If it never does turn up?"

"But it will," confidently asserted Dame Bell.

"So say I," spoke Nancy Tomson. "When once a thing o' this kind es led up to by dreams, it won't stop at the beginning. They dreams es strange indexes sometimes, and Mr. Blase Pellet there didna heve his for nothing. Without that dream the poor man might just heve laid on in thaat shaaft as he faalled, and never been found."

Mr. Blase Pellet, listening to this, shot a glance of intense aggravation at the speaker. Rosaline looked up at him. It was a steady gaze this time, and one that betrayed unqualified contempt.

"Was it a very bad dream?" asked his relative from Falmouth, Mrs. Pellet, this being the first opportunity she had had to question Blase upon the subject.

"Bad enough," shortly replied Pellet; and,

with the words, he made a sudden *détour* to the front door, and took up his standing outside in the sunshine.

The movement led to a general dispersion. Nancy Tomson and the other neighbours departed; Mrs. Pellet went upstairs; Dame Bell passed into the back kitchen to see about their own and her lodgers' dinner: for the ordinary day's work must go on even at funeral times; and Rosaline stayed in the room alone.

"I am very sorry I had that dream."

Lifting her eyes, which had been buried in her hand, Rosaline saw the speaker beside her — Blase Pellet.

"So am I," she shortly answered in a significant tone, that certainly gave him no encouragement to proceed.

"And still more sorry that I spoke of it abroad, Rosaline: for I see that it is giving you pain."

"Pain," she ejaculated, a whole world of anguish in her tone: ay, and of resentment also.

"But it shall be the chief endeavour of my life to atone to you for it, Rosaline. My best care, my truest love, shall be devoted to you. Daily and hourly ——"

"Be quiet, Blase," she interrupted, the

spirit in her eye, the hot flush upon her cheek, rendering her for the moment almost more than beautiful. "We will understand one another at once, and finally. To talk of such a thing as 'love,' or 'care,' to me is worse than useless. My path lies one way, your path lies another: it will not be my fault if they ever cross each other again."

"You do not mean this," he said, after a pause.

"I do mean it. I used to mean it: as you know. I shall mean it always."

"Have you heard that that Raynor's married?" asked Blase.

"Yes," she answered, in a constrained tone, her crimson cheek fading to whiteness.

"Then, perhaps, as he is out of our way, you will think of me, Rosaline. If not now——"

"Neither now nor ever, Blase. Do not deceive yourself."

With a quick movement, she evaded his outstretched hand, that would have sought to detain her, and ran up the stairs. Leaving Mr. Blase Pellet uncommonly discomfited: but not as much so as a less hopeful swain would have been.

“It was a little too soon to speak,” reasoned he with himself. “I must wait a while.”

Of all the scenes connected with Bell's disappearance and his recovery, none caused more excitement than that of the funeral. It was fixed for a late hour—six o'clock in the afternoon. This was to enable the pitmen to be present. The Reverend Titus Backup made no sort of objection. Had they fixed it for midnight, he had been equally agreeable. The hour for the interment came, and people flocked to it from far and wide. Not only did the local miners attend, but also the gangs of men from other mines far distant. Mr. Backup had never seen such a crowd in his life. Just around the grave a small space was left for Mrs. Bell and the other mourners; but in the churchyard and the parts adjacent, including a portion of the Bare Plain, the spectators thronged.

Rosaline was not there. Blase was. In right of his relationship to the Pellets of Falmouth, Blase had been invited to attend; and made one of the mourners, with a flow of

crape hanging to his hat. Whether Rosaline had meant to make one also did not clearly appear, though nobody thought to doubt it; but just before the time of starting, she was seized with a kind of fainting fit. Not quite losing her consciousness, but lying back powerless in her chair, and looking white as death. Nancy Tomson, who was to be of the procession, was the first to recognise the dilemma the seizure placed them in.

“Whaat es to be done?” she cried. “It willna never do to keep *him*, and the paarson, and they folks waiting; but she caan’t walk like thic!”

The “him” applied to poor Bell. At least, to what was left of him. For the convenience of the inquest and other matters, he had been placed in a shelter bordering on the Bare Plain, partly room, partly shed, when first brought up from the pit, and had not been removed. It was there that the mourners would meet the coffin and attend it to the church.

“True,” put in Mrs. Trim; who had deemed it but neighbourly to look in upon the Widow Bell at this sorrowful hour and see

what was to be seen. "They funerals don't waait for nobody : specially when they heve to be put off to aalmost sunset."

"No, it will not do to keep it waiting," breathed Rosaline from her weak and trembling lips. "Do you go on ; all. I will follow if I am able, and catch you up."

Nancy Tomson feebly offered to stay with her, seeing that good feeling demanded as much, but she did not at all mean the offer to be accepted, for she would not miss the ceremony for the world : it was not every day she had the chance of fulfilling a post of importance at a funeral ; and such a funeral as this. Rosaline promptly declined her company, saying she felt much better now and preferred to come after them alone.

So the mourners departed, followed at a respectful distance by many neighbours and others, who had collected to watch and wait for their exit. The chief crowd had gathered about that other building, for which these were now making their way. Men, women, and children, all went tramping off towards it across the Plain ; and in a few minutes Bleak

Row was as absolutely deserted as though it were a city of the dead.

Rosaline slowly rose from her seat, dragged the chair outside, and sat down in the evening sunshine. Thankful was she to be alone. No eye was on her. The houses were empty; the Bare Plain, stretching out around and beyond, lay silent and still, save for that moving mass of human beings, pressing farther and farther away into the distance. The open air seemed necessary to her if she would continue to draw breath. When somewhat more composed, she put up her two hands in the attitude of prayer, bent forward till her forehead touched them, and sat with her eyes closed.

A prayer-book lay on her knee. She had brought it forth, intending to follow the service, soon about to begin. But she could not. There she sat, never once moving her attitude, some scattered passages of the service recurring now and again to her memory, and ascending to heaven from the depths of her anguished heart. Poor Rosaline Bell! There were moist eyes and wrung feelings amid those mourners standing round the grave, but none of them could know aught of the

desperate distress that was *her* portion. None, none.

But now, it was perhaps a somewhat singular coincidence that just as Frank Raynor should have come unexpectedly upon that excited throng, collected round the Bottomless Shaft on the Bare Plain, a few nights before his departure for London, so he should now in like manner come quite as unexpectedly upon this throng, gathered at Bell's funeral. The one had not surprised him more than the other did. He had been just a fortnight absent in London; this was the day of his return, and he was now walking home from the station. All the excitement, consequent upon the finding of Bell, had taken place during these two weeks of Frank's absence. There had been commotion (the result of Blase Pellet's "dream") before his departure, with much talking and surmising; but all action had taken place since.

In a letter written to him by Edina, Frank had learnt that Bell was found. But he learnt nothing more. And he certainly had not thought of coming into the midst of the funeral, and of this large mass of people collected at it,

as he passed the churchyard on his way from the station to his uncle's, on this, the evening of his return.

Before he knew what it all meant, or could quite make out whether his eyes were not playing him false, he found himself accosted by the clerk's wife, Mary Trim. Mrs. Trim, seeing his surprise, told all she knew, intensely gratified at the opportunity of doing it, and a good deal that she did not know. Frank listened in silence.

“ Yes, sir, he was found there, down deep in the pit shaaft, and they jury men never brought et in waun way nor t'other, whether he was throwed down wilful, or faaled in accidental, but just left folks to fight out the question for their own selves. It were a dreadful thing for him, any way, poor man ; to heve been lying there aal thic while.”

“ I never saw so many people at a funeral in my life,” observed Frank, making no direct comment on her words.

He mechanically moved onwards a step, and looked over the hedge that skirted the graveyard. Mary Trim continued her information and remarks : detailing the mourners by name,

and stating that Rosaline was seized with a kind of faintness when they were starting, and so remained at home alone.

“Alone!” cried Frank.

“Aal alone entirely,” repeated Mary Trim. “Every soul from aal paarts es here, Mr. Frank; as you may see. She said perhaps she’d follow ef she felt equal to’t; but she’s not come. She and her aunt talks o’ going back to Falmouth to-morrow; but the widow, poor thing, es against it. Thaat’s the aunt, sir: thaat tall, thin woman.”

Rapidly Frank Raynor debated a question with himself. He much wished to say a few words to Rosaline in private: what if he seized upon this occasion for it? If she were indeed going away again on the morrow, he might find no other opportunity. Yes: at any rate he would try.

Turning somewhat abruptly from the clerk’s wife, leaving her in the middle of a sentence, Frank made a détour round the churchyard on the outskirts of the crowd, and strode very rapidly away over the Bare Plain. Rosaline was sitting just in the same position, her head bowed, her hands raised. His footsteps aroused her.

Respecting her grief as he had never respected any grief yet, feeling for her (and for many other things connected with the trouble) from the bottom of his heart, uncertain and fearful of what the ultimate end would be, Frank took her hand in silence. She gazed up at him yearningly, almost as though she did not at once recognise him, a pitiful expression on her face. For a short while he did not speak a word. But that which he had come to say must be said, and without delay: for already the ceremony had terminated, and the procession of mourners, with the attendant crowd, might be seen slowly advancing towards them across the Bare Plain.

“It has nearly killed me,” moaned Rosaline. “I should be thankful that he is found, but for the fear: thankful that he has had Christian burial. But there can be no more security now. There was not much before.”

“Nay,” spoke Frank, “I think it is just the contrary. While the affair lay in uncertainty, it was liable to be stirred up at any moment: now it will lie at rest.”

“Never,” she answered. “Never so long as Blase Pellet lives. He has brought this much

about ; and he may bring more. Oh, if we could but be hidden from him ! ”

Frank, holding her hand still, in his deep compassion, spoke to her quietly and kindly for a few moments. She seemed to listen as one who hears not, as one whom words cannot reach or soothe ; her eyes were fixed on the ground, her other hand hung listless. But now the first faint hum of the mass of people, approaching nearer and nearer, struck upon her half-dulled ear ; she raised her eyes and saw for the first time what caused it. First in the line walked her mother and aunt, their black robes and the black hoods on their heads lighted up by the setting sun. And as if the sight of those mourning garments put the finishing touch to her already distracted mind and conveyed some sudden terror into it, Rosaline gave a shrill scream and fell into a fit of hysterics, almost of convulsions. Frank could not quit her, even to dash indoors for water. He put his arm round her to hold her still.

“ Whaat on airth es it, sir ? ” demanded Nancy Tomson, who was the first to speak, when the group of hooded women came up.

“ It is only an attack of hysterics,” said

Frank. "She fell into it but now: I think with the sight of your approach. It is a sad day for her, you know; and she does not seem very strong. Will you be so good as to get some water."

"I thought it must be your ghost, Mr. Frank," spoke poor Mrs. Bell, in a subdued tone, as she put back the hood. Believing you were in London —— "

"I am back again," he shortly interrupted. "Seeing your daughter sitting here, I turned aside to speak a word of sympathy."

The sobbing hysterics subsided as quickly as they came on; and Rosaline, putting aside the water untasted, rose of her own accord and passed into the house. The women pressed in after her, leaving Blase Pellet outside. As to the mass of voluntary attendants, they had slackened steps beforehand some distance off, and seemed to be uncertain what next to do: whether to disperse on their various roads, or to remain talking with one another, and watching the house.

This virtually left Frank and Blase Pellet alone. Blase took off his tall Sunday hat, and rubbed his brow with his white handkerchief,

as though the heavy hat and the burning sun had left an unpleasant sensation of heat there. It was, however, neither the hat nor the sun that had put him into that access of warmth ; it was the sight of Frank Raynor. Of Frank Raynor holding Rosaline's hand in his, holding *her*, in fact, and bending over her with what looked like an outburst of affection.

A most disagreeable idea had flashed into Mr. Pellet's head. A dim, indistinct idea, it is true, but none the less caught at. Married man though Frank Raynor was, as the world of Trennach knew, he might not have given up his love of Rosaline ! He might be intending to keep that sentiment on ; keep her to himself, in short, to laugh and chatter with whenever they should meet, to the present destruction of the hopes of everybody else, including Blase Pellet. And Blase, in the plenitude of his wrath, could have struck him to the earth as he stood.

How mistaken people can be ! How wildly absurd does jealousy make them ! Nothing could be further from the thoughts of Frank Raynor than any such meaning : he was at honest peace with all the world, most certainly

intending no harm to Rosaline, or to anyone else. At peace even with that one unit in it, Blase Pellet: and in the plenitude of his good-nature he addressed him cordially.

"You have been one of the followers of poor Bell, I see. The affair is altogether a sad one."

"Yes, it is," replied Blase Pellet. "We have been putting him into his grave; and matters, so far, are hushed up. But I don't say that they are hushed for good. I could hang some people to-morrow."

The intense acrimony of his tone, the steady gaze of his meaning eyes, proved that this man might yet become a dangerous enemy. Frank's courage fell.

"What do you mean?" he asked. But for the very life of him he could not coax his voice to be quite so free and independent as usual.

"It does not matter saying now what I mean, Mr. Raynor. Perhaps I never shall say it. I'd rather not: and it won't be my fault if I do. *You keep out of my way*, and out of somebody else's way, and I daresay I shall be still, and forget it. Out of sight, out of mind, you know, sir."

Frank, deigning no reply, turned into the house to see if there was anything he could do for Rosaline. And then he walked away rapidly towards Trennach.

Mrs. St. Clare had not yet returned to the Mount, but she was expected daily. Frank had received three or four letters from Daisy, re-posted to him in London by Edina, but not one of the letters had he been able to answer in return. They were going about from place to place in obedience to Lydia's whims, Daisy said, and it was simply impossible to give any certain address where a letter might find her. Every day for a week past had her mother announced her intention of turning her steps homeward on the morrow: and every morrow, as it dawned, had her steps been turned to some fresh place instead.

But Frank was in a fever of impatience for their return now. The five hundred pounds legacy was ready to be paid him, and he meant to take Daisy away on the strength of it. He had no fixed plans as yet: they had been delayed by the uncertainty attending the larger sum promised him; the three thousand pounds.

Strictly speaking, it was two thousand five hundred pounds; for this first sum of five hundred was to form a portion of it. It is true that Frank had made inquiries in London; had seen two old-established medical men who were thinking of taking a partner. But each of them wanted a good sum paid down as equivalent; and neither of them seemed to be so sanguine on the score of Frank's coming into the three thousand pounds as he himself was. With his usual straightforward candour, he disclosed the full particulars of the doubts, as well as of the expectations. So, with the future still undecided, here he was, back at Trennach: but only back to make preparations to finally leave it.

With regard to the assistant for Dr. Raynor, he had been more fortunate, and had secured the services of one whom he judged to be in every way suitable. It was a Mr. Hatman. This gentleman was coming down on the morrow. He and Frank were to have travelled together, but Mr. Hatman could not get his arrangements completed quite so soon as he had thought: and Frank dared not delay even another day, lest Mrs. St. Clare should return.

He could not leave Daisy to bear alone the brunt of the discovery of their marriage. Mr. Hatman was to have a three months' trial. At the end of that period, if it were found that he suited the Doctor, and the Doctor and the place suited him, he would remain.

It was not often that Dr. Raynor found fault or gave blame. But on this night, after Frank's return, when they were shut up together alone, he took Frank severely to task. Common report had carried the news of the marriage to him; and he expressed his opinion of it very freely.

"It was perhaps a hasty thing to do, sir, and was entered upon without much thought," admitted Frank, after he had listened. "But we did not care to lose one another."

"Well, I will say no more," returned Dr. Raynor. "The thing cannot be undone now. There's an old saying, Frank, that is perhaps more often exemplified than people think: 'Marry in haste and repent at leisure.' I wish this case of yours may prove an exception, but I can scarcely hope that it will."

"We shall get along all right, Uncle Hugh."

"I trust you will."

“ I told Hatman about it—he is a very nice fellow, and you will be sure to like him, uncle—and he wished me and Daisy jolly good luck. He says his mother’s was a runaway match, and it turned out famously.”

On the day but one following ; that is, the day after Mr. Hatman arrived at Trennach ; Mrs. St. Clare and her daughters returned to the Mount : not reaching it, however, until late at night, for they had missed the earlier train they had meant to travel by.

Frank went up betimes the next morning. His interview with Mrs. St. Clare took place alone. She was surprised and indignant at what he had to disclose—namely, that the marriage ceremony had passed between him and her daughter Margaret. But, on the whole, she was more reasonable than might have been expected.

“ I wash my hands of it altogether, Mr. Frank Raynor, of her and of you, as I said I would—though you may be sure that when I spoke I never contemplated so extreme a step as this that she has taken. But that I cannot disbelieve what, as you say, is so easy of proof, I should have thought it impossible to

be true. Daisy has always been so docile and dutiful."

"I will make her the best of husbands ; she shall never know an hour's care with me," spoke Frank earnestly, his truthful blue eyes and the sincerity of his beaming face expressing more than words could do.

"But what of your means of keeping her?" asked Mrs. St. Clare coldly.

"By the aid of the three thousand pounds I have mentioned to you, I shall get into a first-class practice in London," returned he in his most sanguine manner. "I trust you will not despise that position for her. Our first practitioners take a high standing, Mrs. St. Clare. Some of them are baronets, you know—if you care about a title. I should like to see Daisy Lady Raynor."

"So should I?" returned Mrs. St. Clare in a tone that rather took Frank and his earnestness aback, for it displayed too much mocking disbelief in the prospect. "Well, I wash my hands of you both, Mr. Francis Raynor. I wash my hands of *her*. As she has made her bed so must she lie on it."

Daisy was summoned to the conference. She

came in with timid steps ; and stood, tearful and trembling, in her pretty morning dress of coloured muslin. It chanced to be the one she was married in. Frank Raynor drew her arm within his, and stood with her.

“ You may well shrink from me, unhappy girl ! ” cried Mrs. St. Clare. “ Where is your wedding-ring ? ”

With shaking hands, Daisy produced it, attached to its piece of blue ribbon. Frank took it from her, broke the ribbon, and placed the ring on its proper finger.

“ Never again to be taken off, my dear,” he said. “ Our troubles are over.”

She was to be allowed to remain at the Mount until the afternoon—which Mrs. St. Clare called a great concession—and then she and Frank would start on the first stage of their journey. Daisy might take a box of apparel with her ; the rest should be forwarded to any address she might choose to give.

Back went Frank again to Dr. Raynor’s to prepare for the departure on his own score. Very busy was he that day. Now talking with his uncle, now with Edina, now with Mr. Hatman ; and now running about Trennach to

shake hands with all the world in his sunny-natured way. A hundred good wishes were breathed by him; a hundred little children made happy by sweetmeats. Even to Blase Pellet—even to him—Frank gave a kindly word and nod at parting.

It was late in the afternoon when he, in a close carriage provided for the occasion, went up to the Mount for Daisy. She was ready, and came out, attended to the door by Tabitha: Mrs. St. Clare and Lydia did not appear. Thence she and Frank drove to the station: and found they had five minutes to spare.

Frank had been seeing to the luggage, when Daisy came out of the waiting-room to meet him. It was one of those small stations that contain but one waiting-room for all classes.

“There’s the most beautiful girl sitting inside, Frank,” she said in an undertone.

“Is there?” he carelessly remarked.

“I could not keep my eyes off her, she is so lovely. But she looks very ill.”

They turned into the waiting-room together. And, to Daisy’s extreme surprise, she, the next moment, saw Frank go up and speak to this girl; who was sitting with an elderly com-

panion, both of them in deep mourning. Daisy, her gaze fixed on the beautiful face, wondered who they could be : wondered whether they were ladies, or whether they were not.

But there was no further time. The train came puffing in, and all was bustle. Daisy saw Frank again shake hands cordially with this delicate-looking girl, and whisper a few farewell words to her. She was evidently not departing by this train : probably by one going in the opposite direction.

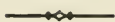
“Who was it, Frank ?” questioned Daisy, when they were at length seated in the carriage.

“It is Rosaline Bell. She and her aunt are going back to Falmouth.”

“*That* Rosaline Bell !” exclaimed Daisy, her face flushing scarlet. “I—I—did not know she was so very beautiful.”

PART THE SECOND.

PART THE SECOND.



CHAPTER I.

AT EAGLES' NEST.

a luxurious chamber at Eagles' Nest, where the carpet was soft as moss to the tread, and the hangings were of silk, and the toilette ornaments were rich and fragile, sat Edina Raynor. Her elbow rested on the arm of the chair, her thoughtful face was bent on her hand, her eyes were taking in the general aspect of the room and its costly appurtenances.

It was autumn weather now, and Edina had come on a short visit to Eagles' Nest. She had wished to put the visit off until the following spring, but had yielded to solicitation. One or other of them at Eagles' Nest was perpetually writing to urge her; and at last Dr. Raynor added his word to theirs. "There is no reason why you should not go, Edina," he said.

“ Hatman and I get on famously well together, you know ; and I am better than I was.” And so Edina had made the long journey ; and—here she was.

Not yet had she been two days at Eagles’ Nest ; but in that short time she had found much to grieve her. Grieved she was, and full of anxiety. Every one of the family, from her Uncle Francis and Mrs. Raynor downwards, had greatly changed. From the simple, unaffected people they had once been, they had transformed themselves into grand personages with assumptions and airs. That was not the worst. That might have been left to find its own level : in time they would no doubt have come back to common sense. What pained Edina was the rate at which they lived. Cost here, expense there, show everywhere. Carriages, horses, servants ; dinners, dressing, gaiety. Where could it all end ? Had the revenues of Eagles’ Nest been what they were twice told, the Major would still have been spending more than his income. This it was that troubled Edina.

And something else troubled her. The *tone* of their mind seemed to be changing : not so

much that of Major and Mrs. Raynor, but of the children. Speaking, of course, chiefly of the elder ones. Formerly they were warm-hearted, unassuming, considerate, full of sympathy for the woes of others. Now all thought seemed to be swallowed up in self: those who wanted help, whether in word or kind, might go where they would for it; selfishness reigned supreme. An underlying dread was making itself heard in Edina's heart, that they were being spoiled by sudden prosperity. As many others have been.

The first day she arrived, the dinner was served at seven o'clock; a very elaborate one. Soup, fish, entrées, meats, sweets: all quite à la mode. Edina was vexed: she thought this had been done for her: but she was much more vexed when she found it was their daily style of living. To her, with the never-to-be-effaced frugal notions implanted in her mind by her father's early straits, with her naturally simple tastes, and her conscientious judgment of what was right and wrong, this luxurious profusion seemed sinful waste. And—they were all so fine! The faded cottons, the washed-out muslins, had of course been rightly

discarded, but they had given place to the most costly gossamer fabrics and to silks that rustled in their richness. They were now just as much over-dressed as they used to be under-dressed. Surely there might have been a medium. Alice had already put off black for her Aunt Atkinson, and was in very slight mourning indeed: in lilac or white hues, with black or grey ribbons. And, with it all, they were acquiring a hard, indifferent tone, as though the world's changes and sorrows could not again concern them.

"All this looks new," mused Edina, referring to the appurtenances of the room. "I don't fancy my Aunt Ann had anything so modern: she favoured old-fashioned furniture. With these expenses going on, Uncle Francis will soon be in greater embarrassment than he ever was in at Spring Lawn. And it is bad for Charley. Very bad. It will foster in him all kinds of extravagant ideas and habits."

As if to escape her thoughts, she rose and stood at the window, looking forth on the pleasant landscape. It was very beautiful. There were hills in the distance and hills near, a large extent of wood and gleaming snatches

of water, green meadows, and a field or two of yellow corn that had ripened late. The leaves on the trees were already beginning to change; to put on their lovely autumn tints. On the lawn were beds of bright flowers. Under a tree sat the Major, sipping a champagne-cup, of which he was fond. Beyond, were three young people playing at croquet: Charles, Alice, and William Stane; the latter a son of Sir Philip Stane, who lived near. Down the path of one of the bare cornfields, whose corn was already reaped and gathered, walked Mademoiselle Delrue, the French governess, and little Kate. Alfred was at school. Robert was mostly with his nurse. Mademoiselle, a finished pianist, superintended Alice's music and read French with her; also took Robert for French: otherwise her duties all lay with Kate. It was, of course, well to have a resident French governess and to pay her sixty guineas a year if they could afford it: but, altogether, one might have supposed Major Raynor had dropped into an income of five or six thousand a year, instead of only two thousand.

A shout and a laugh from the croquet lawn caused Edina to look towards the players.

The game was at an end. At the same moment Alice saw Edina. She threw down her mallet, and ran upstairs.

“Why don’t you come out, Edina? It is a lovely afternoon.”

“I came up for my work, dear, and stayed thinking,” replied Edina, drawing Alice to her side, and keeping her arm round her.

“What were you thinking about?”

“Of many things. Chiefly about you and Charley. You both seem so changed.”

“Do we?”

“And not for the better.”

Alice laughed. She was nearly eighteen now, and very pretty. Her head was lifted with a conscious air: she played with one of the lilac bows on her white dress.

“I know what you mean, Edina: you heard mamma tell me this morning that I was growing vain.”

“No, I did not hear her.” But Edina said no more just then.

“Is Mr. Stane often here?” she asked, presently.

“Oh—yes—pretty well,” replied Alice with a vivid blush. “He and Charley are good

friends. And — and he lives near, you know.”

The blush and the hesitation seemed to hint at a story Edina had not yet glanced at. She had but been wondering whether this young Stane was a desirable companion for Charles : one likely to encourage him in his idleness and his extravagance, or to turn his ideas towards better things.

“ Mr. Stane is older than Charley, Alice.”

“ By several years. He is a barrister, and lives at his chambers in the Temple. Just now he is down here a great deal on account of his father’s illness.”

“ Are they rich people ? ”

“ No, I think not. Not very rich. Of course Sir Philip has plenty of money, and he has retired from practice. He used to be a lawyer in the City of London, and was knighted for something or other.”

“ Is William Stane the only son ? ”

“ He is the second son. The eldest has the law business in the City ; and there are two others. One is in the army.”

“ I like his look,” mused Edina, gazing down at the young man ; who was now talking

with Major Raynor. "And—I think I like his manners. His countenance has pride in it, though."

Pride it certainly had : but it was a pleasant countenance, for all that. William Stane was about the middle height, with a rather rugged, honest, intelligent face, and an earnest manner. His eyes and hair were dark.

"Won't you come down, Edina?"

Edina turned at the appeal, and took up some work that lay ready on the table. "I was getting short of pocket handkerchiefs," she said, in reference to it, "so I bought half a dozen new ones before I left home, and am now hemming them."

Alice shrugged her pretty shoulders. "Let one of the maids hem them for you, Edina. The idea of your troubling yourself with plain work!"

"The idea of my *not* troubling myself!—of my giving them to your maids to do!" returned Edina. "Was life made all for play, child, think you? At Spring Lawn the hemming of handkerchiefs was regarded as pastime, amid the heavier work there was to do."

"Oh, but those days have all changed," said

Alice, somewhat resentfully, not at all pleased at their being recalled.

“ Yes ; and you have all changed with them. —By the way, Alice, I was thinking what a beautiful room this is. Is not the furniture new ? ”

“ All of it,” replied Alice. “ It was quite dingy when we came to it ; and papa and mamma thought that, as it was to be the state room for visitors, they would have it done up properly.”

Edina sighed. “ It is very nice, very ; too good for me. I am not used to such a one.”

She sat down by the side of Major Raynor under the weeping elm-tree, and went on with her work. Charles, Alice, and young Stane began another game of the everlasting croquet. The Major looked on and sipped his champagne-cup, the very image of intense satisfaction. Though he must have known that he was living at a most unjustifiable rate, and that it must bring upon him the old enemy, debt, he looked as free from thought and care as anyone can look in this world. Ay, and felt so, too. Not long yet had he been at this delightful place, Eagles’ Nest ; the time might be counted by

weeks ; but he had already grown fat upon it. He was stout enough before, rather too much so, but he was stouter now. The lost bonds, or vouchers, for the (supposed) accumulated money left by Mrs. Atkinson, were depended upon by the Major as a certain resource for any little extra expenses not justified by his present means. The bonds had not turned up yet, but he never doubted they would come to light some fine day. Hope, that most precious of our gifts, deceitful though it does sometimes prove, was always buoyantly rife in Major Raynor.

It was on this very subject, the lost bonds, that Edina began to speak. The conversation was led up to. She had scarcely sat down when a servant came out of the house and approached his master, saying that "Tubbs" had come again, and particularly wished to have his little account settled, if quite convenient to the Major, as he had a payment to make up.

"But it's not convenient," was the Major's reply. "Tell Tubbs to come again next week."

"Is it any matter of a few shillings or so?" asked Edina, looking up, really thinking it

might be, and that the Major did not care to trouble himself to go indoors for the money. "I have my purse in my pocket, Uncle Francis, and ——"

"Bless you, my dear, it's a matter of fifteen or twenty pounds," interrupted the Major, complacently watching his servant, who was carrying the message indoors. "For new harness and saddles, and things. Tubbs is a saddler in the village, and we thought we would give him a turn. Your Aunt Ann employed the tradespeople of the locality, and we think it right to do the same."

"Perhaps he wants his money, Uncle Francis?"

"No doubt of it, my dear. I'll pay him when I can. But as to ready money, I seem to be more short of it than ever. All the spare cash that came to me at your Aunt Ann's death has run away in a wonderful manner. Sometimes I set myself to consider what it can have gone in; but I might as well try to count the leaves on that walnut-tree."

"I am very sorry," said Edina. "And you are living at so much cost!"

"Oh, it will be all right when the bonds turn

up," cried the Major cheerfully. "Street says, you know, that there must be fifteen or twenty thousand pounds somewhere."

"But he is not sure that there are any bonds to turn up, Uncle Francis. He does not *know* that the money exists still. Aunt Ann may have speculated and lost it."

"Now, my dear, is that likely?" cried the Major. "Ann was never a speculating woman. And, if she had lost the money in any way, she would have been sure to say so. Street tells me she gave him all kinds of injunctions during the last year for the proper keeping-up of this estate, involving no end of cost: she'd not have done that had there been no accumulated money to fly to."

"And do you keep it up well, uncle?"

"Why, how can I, Edina? I've no means to do it with."

"But are not the revenues of the estate sufficient to keep it up?"

"Well, they would be; but then you see I have so many expenses."

Edina did quite two inches of her hemming before speaking again. The course they had embarked upon at Eagles' Nest seemed to be a

wrong one altogether: but she felt that it was not her place to take her uncle to task.

“I’m sure I hope the money will be found, Uncle Francis.”

“So do I, my dear, and soon too. It shall be better for you when it is. Why Ann should have left my brother Hugh and you unremembered, never mentioning your names in her will, I cannot tell; but it was very unjust of her, and I will make it up to you, Edina, in a small way. Frank is to have three thousand pounds when the money turns up, and you shall have the same.”

Edina smiled. She thought the promise very safe and very hopeless: though she knew the good-hearted speaker meant what he said.

“Thank you all the same, Uncle Francis, but I do not require any of the money; and I am sure you will have ways and means yourself for every shilling of it, however much it may prove to be. How long does Frank mean to stay abroad?”

“Well, I conclude he is ‘waiting for the money to turn up,’ said the Major.

“Is it wise of him to stay so long, do you think?”

“I’m sure I don’t know. When he gets the money he will return to London and settle down.”

And so they chatted on. Mrs. Raynor, who had been lying down with a headache, came out and joined them. The afternoon wore on, and the croquet came to an end. Mr. Stane approached to say good-bye.

“Won’t you stay for some dinner?” asked the Major.

“I should like to very much indeed, but I must go home,” replied the young man: and once more, as Edina watched the sincere face and heard the earnest tone, she decided that she did like him. “My father particularly desired me to be at home for dinner: he was feeling less well again.”

“Then you must stay with us next time,” spoke the hospitable Major. And Mr. Stane shook hands around, leaving Alice to the last, and being somewhat longer over it with her than he need have been.

His departure was the sign for a general break-up. Major and Mrs. Raynor went indoors, Charles strolled across the lawn with William Stane. Edina retained her place and

went on with her work. Charles soon came back again, and sat down by her.

“What a pity you don’t play croquet, Edina ! The last game was a good one.”

“If I had all my time on my hands as you have, Charley, and nothing to do with it, I might perhaps take up croquet. I can’t tell.”

“I know what that tone means, Edina. You want to find fault with me for idleness.”

“I could find fault with you for a good many things, Charles. The idleness is not the worst.”

“What is the worst?” asked Charles, amused.

“You have so changed in these few short weeks that I ask myself whether you can be the same single-minded, well-intentioned, simple-hearted young people who lived at Spring Lawn. I speak of you and Alice, Charley.”

“Circumstances have changed,” returned Charles. “Alice”—for the girl at that moment came up to them—“here’s Edina saying we have so changed since leaving Bath that she wonders whether we are ourselves or not. How have we changed, pray, Edina ?”

“Your minds and manners are changing,” coolly spoke Edina, beginning to turn down the hem on the other side of the handkerchief. “Do you know what kind of people you put me in mind of now?”

“No. What?”

“Of nouveaux riches.”

“For shame, Edina!”

“You do. And I think the world must see you as I see. You are haughty, purse-proud, indifferent.”

“Go on,” said Charley. “I like to hear it.”

Edina did go on. “*You* are the worst, Charles. You seem to think the world was made for you alone. When that poor man came yesterday, a cottager, was he not asking for some favour or assistance, or complaining of some hardship—I did not rightly catch the words—you just flung him off as though he were not of the same species of created being as yourself; as though he were worth no better than to be trampled underfoot. Have you a bad heart, Charles?”

Charles laughed. “I think I have a very good heart—as hearts go. The man is a troublesome man. His name’s Beck. He has

been here three times, and wants I don't know what all done to his wretched shell of a cottage; says Mrs. Atkinson promised it. My father can't afford to listen to these complaints, Edina: and if he did it for one, he must do it for all. The fact is, Aunt Ann did so much for the wretches that she spoilt them."

"But you might have spoken kindly to the man. Civilly, at any rate."

"Oh, bother to him!" cried Charley: who was much of a boy yet in his manners. "Only think of all those years of poverty, Edina: we ought to enjoy ourselves now. Why, we had to look at a shilling before we spent it. And did not often get it to spend."

"But, Charley, you think *only* of enjoyment. Nothing is thought of, here at Eagles' Nest, but the pleasure and gratification of the present hour, day by day, as the days come round."

"Well, I shall have enough work to do by-and-by, Edina. I go to Oxford after the long vacation."

"And you go without any preparation for it," said Edina.

"Preparation! Why I am well up in classics," cried Charley, staring at Edina.

"I was not thinking of classics. You have had no experience, Charles; you are like a child in the ways of the world."

"I tell you, Edina, I am a fair scholar. What else do you need at Oxford? You don't need experience there."

"Well for you, Charley, if it shall prove so," was Edina's answer, as she folded her work to go indoors; for the evening was drawing on, and the air felt chilly. Changed they all were, more than she could express. They saw with one set of eyes, she with another.

"What a tiresome thing Edina is getting!" exclaimed Alice to her brother, as Edina disappeared.

"A regular croaker."

"An old maid."

The only one who could not be said to have changed much, was Mrs. Raynor. She was gentle, meek, simple-mannered as ever: but even she was drawn into the vortex of visiting and gaiety, of show and expense, of the parade and ceremony that had set in. She seemed to have no leisure time to give to anything else. This day was the only quiet day Eagles' Nest had during the visit of Edina. Mrs. Raynor,

with her yielding will, could not help herself altogether. But Edina was grieved to see that she neglected the religious training of her young children. Even the hearing of their evening prayers was turned over to the governess.

“Mademoiselle Delrue is a Protestant,” said Mrs. Raynor; when on this same evening, Edina ventured to speak a word upon the subject, as Kate and Robert said good night and left the drawing-room.

“I know she is,” said Edina. “But none but a mother should, in these vital matters, train her children. You always used to do it, Mary.”

“If you only knew how fully my time and thoughts are occupied!” returned Mrs. Raynor, in a tone of much deprecation. “We live in a whirl here: just that; and it is rather too much for me. And, to tell you the truth, Edina, I sometimes wonder whether the old life, with all its straitened means, was not the happier; whether we have in all respects improved matters, in coming to Eagles’ Nest.”

CHAPTER II.

APPREHENSIONS.

THE fine old house, Eagles' Nest, lay buried in snow. It was Christmas-tide, and Christmas weather. All the Raynor family had assembled within its walls: with the exception of Dr. Raynor and his daughter Edina. Charles had come home from keeping his first term at Oxford; Alfred from school; Frank Raynor and his wife had returned from their sojourn abroad.

All these past months, during which we have lost sight of them, Frank and Daisy had been on the Continent. Close upon their departure from Trennach, Frank, through his medical friend, Crisp, was introduced to a lady who was going to Switzerland with her only son; a sickly lad of fifteen, in whom the doctors at home had hardly been able to keep life. This lady, Mrs. Berkeley, proposed to Frank to travel with them as medical attendant on her son,

and she had not the least objection to Frank's wife being of the party. So preliminaries were settled, and they started. Frank considered it a most opportune chance to have fallen to him while he was waiting for the lost money to turn up.

But the engagement did not last long. Hardly were they settled in Switzerland when the lad died, and Mrs. Berkeley returned to England. Frank stayed on where he was. The place and the sojourn were alike pleasant; and, as he remarked to his wife, who knew but he might pick up a practice there, amid the many English, resident in the town, or flocking to it as birds of passage? Daisy was just as delighted to remain as he: they had funds in hand, and could afford to throw care to the wind. Even had care shown itself: which it did not. The young are ever sanguine, rarely gifted with much forethought. Frank and his wife especially lacked it. Some odds and ends of practice did drop in to Frank, just a small case or so, at long intervals: and they remained stationary for some time in perfect complacency. But when Christmas approached, and Frank found that his five

hundred pounds would not hold out for ever, and that the notion of a practice in the Swiss town was but a castle in the air, he took his wife home again. By invitation, they went at once to Eagles' Nest.

The Christmas Day passed merrily at Eagles' Nest, and some of the days immediately succeeding to it. On New Year's Day they were bidden to an entertainment at Sir Philip Stane's; Major and Mrs. Raynor, Charles and Alice; a later invitation having come in for Frank and his wife. William Stane was a frequent visitor at Eagles' Nest whenever he was sojourning at his father's; and, though he had not yet spoken, few could doubt that the chief object to draw him thither was Alice Raynor.

Yes. Sunshine and merry-making, profusion and reckless expenditure reigned within the doors of Eagles' Nest; but little save poverty, distress, and dissatisfaction, existed (speaking of the estate) beyond its gates. Mrs. Atkinson had ever been liberal in her care of the estate; the land had been enriched and thoroughly well kept; the small tenants and labourers cared for. One thing she had not done so extensively as she might: and that was, im-

prove the dwellings of the labourers. Repairs she had made from time to time ; but the places were really beyond repair. A few of them were like pigsties : and that was the best that could be said. Each tenement wanted one of two things : to be thoroughly renovated and to have an additional sleeping-room built ; or else to be replaced by a new abode. During the last year of Mrs. Atkinson's life, she seemed to wake up suddenly to the necessity of something being done. Perhaps with the approach of death—which approach will often open our eyes to many things that they remain closed to before—she saw the supineness she had been guilty of. Street the lawyer was hastily summoned to Eagles' Nest : he was ordered to procure plans and estimates for new dwellings. A long row (some thirty cottages in number) was hastily begun. While the builders were commencing their work, Mrs. Atkinson died. With nearly her last breath she charged Mr. Street to see that the houses were completed, and that the pigsties (to distinguish them by that name) were also repaired and made healthy.

Mr. Street could only hand over the charge to the inheritor of the estate, Major Raynor.

The reader may remember the Major spoke of it to Edina. The lawyer could not do more than that, or carry out Mrs. Atkinson's wishes in any other way. And the Major did nothing. His will might have been good enough to carry out the change, but he lacked the means. So much money was required for his own personal wants and those of his family, that he had none to spare for other people. The ready money he came into had chiefly gone in paying his back debts : until these debts stared him in the face in black and white, he had not believed he owed a tithe of them. Which is a very common experience. So the new dwellings were summarily stopped, and remained as they were—so many skeletons : and the tumble-down pigsties, lacking proper space, and drainage, and whitewash, and everything else that could render them decent and healthy, grew worse day by day, and were an eyesore to spectators and the talk of the neighbourhood.

Not only did *they* suffer from the Major's lack of money and foresight ; many other needs were crying out for it : these are but given as a specimen. Above all, he was doing no good

to the land, spending nothing to enrich it, and sparing necessary and ordinary labour. Perhaps had Major Raynor understood the cultivation and the requirements of land, he might have made an effort to nourish his own better : as it was, it could but deteriorate day by day.

This state of things had caused a kind of antagonism to set in between Eagles' Nest and its poor dependents. The labourers and their families grumbled ; the Major, conscious of the state of affairs, and feeling some inward shame in consequence, but knowing at the same time that he was powerless to remedy it, shunned them. When complaints were brought to the house he would very rarely see the complainers. A warm-hearted man, he could not *bear* to hear them. Mrs. Raynor and the elder children, understanding matters but very imperfectly, naturally espoused the Major's cause, and looked upon the small tenants as a most barbarous, insubordinate set of wretches, next kin to insurgents. When the poor wives or children fell sick, no succour was sent to them from Eagles' Nest. With this estrangement reigning, Mrs. Raynor did not attempt to help : not from

coldness of heart, but that she considered they did not deserve to be helped, and, moreover, thought it would be flung back on her if she did attempt it.

There was where the shoe pinched the poor. The evil dwellings they were used to; though indeed with every winter and every summer they grew more evil than ever; but they were not accustomed to utter neglect, contemptuous neglect, as they looked upon it, in times of need. Mrs. Atkinson had been always a generous mistress: when sickness or sorrow or distress at slack times of work set in, her hand and purse were ever ready. Coals in the severe weather, Christmas cheer, warm garments for the scantily clad, broth for the sick; she had furnished all: and it was the entire lack of this aid that was so much felt now. The winter was unusually severe; it frequently is so after a very hot summer; labour was scarce, food dear; and a great deal of sickness prevailed. So that you perceive all things were not so flourishing in and about Eagles' Nest as they might have been, and Major Raynor's bed was not entirely one of rose-leaves.

But, things unpleasant that are out of sight,

are, it is said, mostly out of mind—Mr. Blase Pellet told us so much a chapter or two back—and the discomfort out of doors did not disturb the geniality within. At Eagles' Nest, the days floated on in a round of enjoyment; they seemed to be one continuous course of pleasure that would never have an ending. Daisy Raynor had never been so happy in all her life: Eagles' Nest, she said, was perfect.

The music and the wax-lights, the flowers and the evergreens rendered the rooms at Sir Philip Stane's a scene of enchantment. At least it seemed so to Alice Raynor as she entered upon it. Something that you might read about in fairyland, but scarcely see in this prosaic life. William Stane stood near the door, and caught her hand as she and Charles were following their father and mother.

"The first dance is for me, remember, Alice," he whispered. And her pretty cheeks flushed and a half-conscious smile of assent parted her lips, as she passed on to Lady Stane.

Lady Stane, a stout and kindly woman in emerald green, received her kindly. She suspected that this young lady might become her

daughter-in-law some day or another, and she looked at her more critically than she had ever looked before. Alice could bear the inspection to-night : her new white dress was beautiful ; her face was charming, her manner was modest and graceful. “ The most ladylike girl in the room,” mentally decided Lady Stane, “ and no doubt will have a fair purse of money. William might do worse.”

William Stane thought he might do very much worse. There’s no doubt he was truly attached to Alice. Not perhaps in the wild and ardent manner which some lovers own to : all natures are not capable of that : but he did love her, her only, and he hoped that when he married it was she who would be his wife. He was not ready to marry yet. He was progressing in his profession, but with the proverbial slowness that is said to attend the advancement of barristers ; and he did not wish to speak just at present. Meanwhile he was quite content to make love tacitly ; and he felt sure that his intentions were understood.

His elder brother was not present this evening, and it fell to William to act as such, and to dispense his favours, and himself as

a partner, pretty equally amidst the guests ; but every moment that he could snatch for Alice, was given to her ; in every dance that he could crib from society's exactions, she was his partner.

“ Have you enjoyed the evening, Alice ? ” he questioned in a whisper, as he was taking her to the carriage at three o'clock in the morning.

“ I never enjoyed an evening half so much,” was the shyly-breathed answer. And Mr. William Stane got possession of her hand as she spoke, and kept it in his to the last.

If this light-hearted carelessness did not come to an end ! If freedom from trouble could but last for ever ! Pleasure first, says some wise old saw, pain afterwards. With the morning's dawn the pain came to Eagles' Nest.

Amid the letters delivered to Major Raynor—who, for a wonder, had got up betimes that morning, having been unable to sleep, and was turning places over in his study to search for the lost bonds—was one from Oxford. It enclosed a very heavy bill for wine supplied to his son Charles : heavy, considering Mr. Charles's years and the short duration of his

one sojourn at the University. The Major stared at it, with his spectacles, and without his spectacles; he looked at the heading, he gazed at the foot; and finally when he mastered it he went into a passion, and ordered Charles before him. So peremptory was the summons, that Charles appeared in haste, half dressed. His outburst of temper, when he found out what the matter was, quite equalled his father's.

"I'm sure I thought you must be on fire down here, sir," said he. "What confounded sneaks they are, to apply to you! I can't understand their doing it."

"Sneaks be shot!" cried the wrathful Major. "Do you owe all this, or don't you? That's the question."

"Why, the letter was addressed to *me*!" exclaimed Charles, who had been examining the envelope. "I must say, sir, you might allow me to open my own letters."

But the Major was guiltless of any ill faith. The mistake was the butler's. He had inadvertently placed the letter amongst his master's letters, and the Major opened it without glancing at the address.

“What does it signify, do you suppose, whether I opened it or you?” demanded the Major. “Not that I did it intentionally. I should have to know of it: *you* can’t pay this.”

“They can wait,” said Charles.

“Wait! Do you mean to confess to me that you have had all this wine?” retorted the Major, irascible for once. “Why, you must be growing into—into what I don’t care to name!”

“You can’t suppose that I drank it, sir. The other undergraduates give wine parties, and I have to do the same. They drink the wine; I don’t.”

“That is, you drink it amongst you,” roared the Major; “and a nice disreputable lot you must all be. I understood young men went to college to study; not to drink, and run up bills. What else do you owe? Is this all?”

Charles hesitated in his answer. An untruth he would not tell. The Major saw what the hesitation meant, and it alarmed him. When we become frightened our wrath cools down. The Major dropped into a chair, and lost his fierceness and his voice together.

“Charley,” said he in a subdued tone like a whisper, “I have not the money to pay with.

You know I've not. If it's much, it will ruin me."

"But it is not much, father," returned Charles, his own anger disarmed, and contrition taking its place. "There may be one or two more trifling bills : nothing to speak of."

"What on earth made you run them up ? "

"I'm sure I don't know ; and I am very sorry for it," said Charles. "These things accumulate in the most extraordinary manner. When you think in your own mind you owe but a few shillings at some place or another, it turns out to be pounds. You have no idea what it is, father ! "

"Have I not ! " returned the Major, significantly. "It is because I have rather too much idea of the insidious way in which debt creeps upon one, that I should like to see you keep out of its toils. Charley, my boy, I have been staving off liabilities all my life, and not worried myself in doing it ; but it is beginning to tell upon me now. My constitution's changing. I suppose I must be growing fidgety."

"Well, don't let this worry you, father. It's not so much."

“Much or little, it must be paid. I don’t want my son to get into bad odour at the University; to have ‘debtor’ attached to his name. You are over young for that, Mr. Charles.”

Charles remained silent. The Major was evidently in blissful ignorance of the latitude of opinion current amid the Oxonians.

“You go back and dress yourself, Charles; and get your breakfast over; and then, just sit down and make a list of what it is you owe, and I’ll see what can be done.”

Now in the course of this same morning, it chanced that Frank Raynor took occasion to speak to his uncle about money matters, as connected with his own prospects, which he had not previously entered upon during his present stay. The Major was pacing his study in a gloomy mood when Frank entered.

“You look tired, Uncle Francis. Just as though you had danced all night.”

“I leave that to you younger men,” returned the Major, drawing his easy chair to the fire. “As to being tired, Frank, I am; though I have not danced.”

“Tired of what, uncle?”

“Of everything, I think. Sit down, lad.”

“I want to speak to you, Uncle Francis, concerning myself and my plans,” said Frank, taking a seat near the fire. “It is time I settled down to something.”

“Is it?” was the answer. The Major’s thoughts were elsewhere.

“Why, yes, don’t you think it is, sir? The question is, what is it to be? With regard to the bonds for that missing money, uncle? They have not turned up, I conclude?”

“They have not turned up, my boy, or the money either. If they had, you’d have been the first to hear of it. I have been looking for them this very morning.”

“What is your true opinion about the money, Uncle Francis?” resumed Frank after a pause. “Will it ever be found?”

“Yes, Frank, I think it will. I feel fully assured that the money is lying somewhere—and that it will come to the surface sooner or later. I should be sorry to think otherwise; for, as goodness knows, I need it badly enough.”

A piece of blazing wood fell off the grate. Frank caught the tongs, and put it up again.

“And I wish it could be found for your sake also, Frank. You want your share of it, you know.”

“Why, you see, Uncle Francis, without money I don’t know what to be at. If I were single, I’d engage myself out as assistant to-morrow; but for my wife’s sake I wish to take a better position than that.”

“Naturally you do, Frank. And so you ought.”

“It would be easy enough if I had the money in hand; or if I could with any certainty say when I should have it.”

“It’s sure to come,” said the Major.
“Sure.”

“Well, I hope so. The difficulty is—when?”

“You must wait a bit longer, my boy. It may turn up any day. To-night, even: to-morrow morning. Never a day passes but I go ferreting into some corner or other of the old house, thinking I may put my hand upon the papers. They are lying in it somewhere, I know, overlooked.”

“But I don’t see my way clear to wait. Not to wait long. We must have a roof over our heads, and means to keep it up ——”

“Why, you have a roof over your heads,” interrupted the Major. “Can’t you stay here?”

“I should not like to stay too long,” avowed Frank in his candour. “It would be abusing your hospitality.”

“Abusing a fiddlestick!” cried the Major, staring at Frank. “What’s come to you? Is the house not large enough?—and plenty to eat in it? I’m sure you may stay here for ever; and the longer you stay the more welcome you’ll be. We like to have you.”

“Thank you greatly, Uncle Francis.”

“Daisy does not want to go away; she’s as happy as the day’s long,” continued the Major. “Just you make yourselves comfortable here, Frank, my boy, until the money turns up and I can hand you over some of it.”

“Thank you again, uncle,” said Frank, accepting the hospitality in the same free-hearted spirit that it was offered. “For a little while at any rate we will stay with you; but I hope before long to be doing something and to get into a home of my own. I can run up to town once or twice a week and be looking out.”

“Of course you can.”

“Had you been a rich man, Uncle Francis, I would have asked you to lend me a thousand pounds, or so, to set me up until the nest-egg is found; but I know you have not got it to lend.”

“*Got it to lend!*” echoed the Major in a tone of dismayed astonishment. “Why, Frank, my boy, I want such a sum lent to myself. I wish to my heart I knew where to pick it up. Here’s Charles must have money now: has come home from Oxford with a pack of debts at his back!”

“Charles has!” exclaimed Frank in surprise.

“And would like to make me believe that all the rest of the young fellows there run up the same bills! every man Jack of ’em! No, no, Master Charley: you don’t get me to take in *that*. Young men can be steady at college as well as at home if they choose to be. Charley’s just one that’s led any way. He is young, you see, Frank: and he is thrown there, I expect, amid a few rich blades to whom money is no object, and must needs do as they do. The result is, he has made I

don't know what liabilities, and I must pay. Oh, it's all a worry and bother together ! ”

Not intentionally, but by chance, Frank, on quitting his uncle, came upon Charles. Looking into a room in search of his wife, there sat Charley at a table, pen and ink and paper before him, setting down his debts, so far as he could judge of and recollect them. Frank went in and closed the door.

Charles let off a little of his superfluous discomfort in abuse of the people who had presumed to trouble him with the wine bill. Frank sat down, and drew the paper towards him.

“ I had no idea it could be as much as that, Frank,” was the rueful avowal. “ And I wish with all my heart their wine parties and their fast living had been at the bottom of the sea ! ”

“ *Is it as much, Charley ?* ”

“ To tell the truth, I am afraid it's more,” said Charles, with candour. “ I've only made a guess at the other amounts, and I know I have not put down too much. That tailor is an awful man for sticking it on : as are all the rest of the crew, for the matter of that. I was trying to recollect how many times

I've had horses, and traps, and things; and I can't."

"Does Uncle Francis know it comes to all this?"

"No. And I don't care to let him know. Things seem to worry him so much now. I do wish that lost money could be found!"

"Just what your father and I have been wishing," cried Frank. "Look here, Charley. I have a little left out of my five hundred pounds. You shall have the half of it: just between ourselves, you know: and then the sum my uncle must find will not look so formidable to him. Nay, no thanks, lad: would you not all do as much for me—and more? And we are going to stay on here for a time—and that will save my pocket."

It was simply impossible for Frank Raynor to see a difficulty of this kind, or indeed of any kind, and not help to relieve it if he had help in his power. That he would himself very speedily require the money he was now giving away, was all too probable: but he was content to forget that in Charley's need.

The one individual person in all the house that Charles would have kept from the know-

ledge of his folly—and in his repentance he did look upon it as folly most extreme—was his mother. He loved her dearly; and he had the grace to be ashamed, for her sake, of what he had done, and to hope that she would never know it. A most fallacious hope, as he was soon to find, for Major Raynor had taken up the news to her with open mouth.

She was sitting on the low sofa in her dressing-room that evening at dusk, when Charles went in. The firelight played on her face, showing its look of utter weariness, and the traces of tears.

“What’s the matter, mother?” he asked, sitting down beside her and taking her hand. “Are you ill?”

“Not ill, Charley,” she answered. “Only tired and—and out of sorts.”

“What has tired you? Last night, I suppose. But you have been resting all day.”

“Not last night particularly. So much high living does not suit me.”

“High living!” exclaimed Charles in a wondering accent. “Is it the gravies?—or the plum-puddings?”

Mrs. Raynor could not forbear a smile. “I

was not thinking of the table, Charles; the gravies and the puddings; but of the fast, artificial existence. We seem to have no rest. It is excitement always; nothing but excitement. We went out last night; we go out to dinner to-morrow night; people come here the next night. Every day that we are at home there's something; if it's not luncheon and afternoon tea, it's dinner; and if it's not dinner, it's supper. I have to think of it all; the entertainments and the dress, and everything; and to go out when you go; and—and I fear it is getting rather too much for me."

"You lie up, mother, for a few days," advised Charles, affectionately. "Keep here by your own fire, and turn things over to Alice and the servants. You will soon be all right again."

Mrs. Raynor did not answer. She had Charles's hand now, holding it between both of hers, and was looking steadfastly at the flickering blaze. A silence ensued. Charles lost himself in a train of thought.

"What about this trouble of yours, Charley?"

It was a very unpleasant waking up for him. Of all things, this was what he had wanted kept from her. His ingenuous face—and it

was an ingenuous face in spite of the wine bills —flushed deeply with annoyance.

“It’s what you need not have heard about, mother. I came away from Oxford without paying a few pounds I owe there; that’s all. There need be no fuss about it.”

“I hear of wine bills, and hired horses, and things of that kind. Oh, my dear, *need* you have entered into that sort of fast life?”

“Others enter into it,” said Charley.

“It is not so much the cost that troubles me,” added Mrs. Raynor, in a loving tone; “that can be met somehow. It is ——” she stopped as if seeking for words.

“It is what, mother?”

“Charley, my dear, what I think of is this —that you may be falling into the world’s evil ways. It is so easy to do it; you young lads are so inexperienced and confiding; you think all is fair that looks fair; that no poison lurks in what has a specious surface. And oh, my boy, you know that there is a world after this world; and if you were to fall too deeply into the ways of *this*, to get to love it, to be unable to do without it, you might never gain the other. Some young lads that have fallen away

from God have not cared to find Him again ; never have found Him."

"There has been no harm," said Charley. "And I assure you I don't often miss chapel."

"Charley, dear, there's a verse in Ecclesiastes that I often think of," she resumed in a low sweet tone. "All mothers think of it, I fancy, when their sons begin to go out in the world."

"In Ecclesiastes?" repeated Charley.

"The verse that Edina illuminated for us once, when she was staying at Spring Lawn. It was her doing it, I think, that helped to impress it so much on my memory."

"I remember it, mother mine." And the words ran through Charley's thoughts as he spoke.

"Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth ; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes : but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

CHAPTER III.

A TIGER.

THE late spring flowers were blooming ; the air was soft and balmy. Easter was rather late ; in fact, April was passing ; and when Easter comes at that period, it generally brings with it glowing sunshine.

Eagles' Nest, amid other favoured spots, seemed to be as bright as the day was long. Once more Major Raynor had all his children about him ; also Frank and Daisy. For anything that could be seen on the surface, merry hearts reigned universally ; none of them seemed to have a care in the world.

Frank decidedly had not. Sanguine and light-hearted, he was content as ever to let the future take care of itself. Yielding to persuasive hospitality, he still stayed on at Eagles' Nest. His wife expected to be laid up in the course of a month or two : and where, asked the Major, could she be better attended to than

at Eagles' Nest? Daisy, of course, wished to stay; she should feel safe, she said, in the care of Mrs. Raynor: and who would wish to run away from so pleasant a home? Twenty times at least had Frank gone up to town to see if he could pick up any news, or hear of any place to suit him. Delusive dreams often presented themselves to his mental vision, of some doctor, rich in years and philanthropy, who might be willing to take him in for nothing, to share his first-class practice. As yet the benevolent old gentleman had not been discovered, but Frank quite believed he must exist somewhere.

Another thing had not been discovered: the missing money. But Major Raynor, sanguine as ever was his nephew, did not lose faith in its existence. It would come to light some time he felt certain; and of this he never ceased to assure Frank. Embarrassments decidedly increased upon the Major, chiefly arising from the lack of ready cash: for the greater portion of *that* was sure to be forestalled before it came in. Still, a man who enjoys from two to three thousand per annum cannot be so badly off: money comes to the fore somehow: and on the whole Major Raynor led an easy, indolent, and

self-satisfactory life. Had they decreased their home expenses, it would have been all the better: and they might have done that very materially, and yet not touched on home comforts. But neither Major nor Mrs. Raynor knew how to set about retrenchment: and so the senseless profusion went on.

“What is there to see, Charley?”

The questioner was Frank. In crossing the grounds, some little distance from home, he came upon Charles Raynor. Charles was stooping to screw his neck over the corner of a stile, by which the high hedge was divided that bordered the large, enclosed, three-cornered tract of grass-land known as the common. On one side of this common were those miserable dwellings, the pigsties: in a line with them ran the row of new skeletons, summarily stopped in erection. On the other side stood some pretty detached cottage-houses, inhabited by a somewhat better class of people; while this high hedge—now budding into summer bloom, and flanked with a sloping bank, rich in moss, and flowering weeds, and wild blossoms—bordered the third side. In one corner, between the hedge and the bettermost houses, flourished a

small thick grove of trees. It all belonged to Major Raynor.

“Nothing particular,” said Charley, in answer to the question. “I was only looking at a fellow.”

Frank sent his eyes ranging over the green space before him. Three or four paths traversed it in different directions. A portion of it was railed off by wooden fencing, and on this some cattle grazed ; but on most of it the grass was growing, intended for the mower in a month or two’s time. Frank could not see a soul ; and said so. Some children, indeed, were playing in front of the huts ; but Charles had evidently not alluded to them : his gaze had been directed to the opposite side, near the grove.

“He has disappeared among those trees,” said Charles.

“Who was it ?” pursued Frank : for there was something in his young cousin’s tone and manner suggestive of uneasiness, and it awoke his own curiosity.

Charles turned round and put his back against the side post of the stile. He had plucked a small green twig from the hedge, and was twirling it about between his lips.

“ Frank, I am in a mess.—Keep a look-out yonder, and if you see a stranger, tell me.”

“ Over-run the constable at Oxford this term, as before ? ” questioned Frank, leaping to the truth by instinct.

Charles nodded. “ And I assure you, Frank,” he added, attempting excuse for himself, “ that I no more intended to get into debt this last term than I intended to hang myself. When I went down after Christmas, I had formed the best resolutions in the world. I told the mother she might trust me. Nobody could have wished to keep straighter than I wished : and somehow —— ”

“ You didn’t,” put in Frank at the pause.

“ I have managed to fall into a fast set, and that’s the truth,” confessed Charles. “ And I think the very deuce is in the money. It runs away without your knowing it.”

“ Well, the tradespeople must wait,” said Frank, cheerfully ; for he was just as genial over this trouble as he would have been over pleasure. “ They have to wait pretty stiffly for others.”

“ The worst of it is, I have accepted a bill

or two," cried Charley, ruefully. "And—I had a writ served upon me the last day of term."

"Whew!" whistled Frank. "A writ?"

"One. And I expect another. Those horrid bills—there are two of them—were drawn at only a month's date. Of course the time's out; and the fellow wouldn't renew; and—I expect there'll be the dickens to pay. The amount is not much; each fifty pounds; but I have not the ghost of a shilling to meet it with."

"What do you owe besides?"

"As if I knew! There's the tailor, and the bootmaker, and the livery stableman, and the wine man —— Oh, I can't recollect."

Had Frank possessed the money, in pocket or prospective, he would have handed out help to Charles there and then. But he did not possess it. He was at a nonplus.

"When once a writ's served, they can take you, can't they?" asked Charles, stooping to pluck a pretty pink blossom from the bank, the twig being bitten away to nothing.

"I think so," replied Frank, who had himself contrived to steer clear of these unpleasant shoals, and knew no more of their

power, or non-power, than Charles did. "By the way, though, I don't know. Have they got judgment?"

"Judgment?—What's that? Sure to have got it if it's anything bad. And I think I am going to be arrested," continued Charles, dropping his voice, and turning round to face the common again. "It's rather a blue look-out. I should not so *much* mind it for myself, I think: better men than I have had to go through the same: but for the fuss there'll be at home."

"The idea of calling yourself a man, Charley! You are but a boy yet."

"By the way, talking of that, Jones of Corpus told me a writ could not be legally served upon me as I was not of age. Jones said he was sure of it. What do you think, Frank?"

"I don't know. To tell you the truth, Charley, I am not at home in these things. But I should suppose that the very fact of the writ having been served upon you is a proof that it can be done, and that Jones of Corpus is wrong. William Stane could tell you: he must have all points of the law at his fingers' ends."

"But I don't care to ask William Stane. Maybe they take it for granted that I am of age. Any way, I got served with the writ at Oxford; and, unless I am mistaken," added Charles, gloomily, "a fellow has followed me here, and is dodging my heels to arrest me."

"What are your grounds for thinking it, Charley? Have you seen any suspicious person about?"

"Yes, I have. Before you came up just now, I ——"

The words were broken off suddenly. Charles leaped aside from the corner of the stile to hide himself behind the hedge. Some individual was emerging from the grove of trees; and he, it was evident, had caused the movement.

"If he turns his steps this way, tell me, Frank, and I'll make a dash homewards through the oak-coppice," came the hurried whisper.

"All right. No. He is making off across the common."

"That may be only a ruse to throw me off my guard," cried Charley from the hedge. "Watch. He will come over here full pelt in a minute. He looks just like a tiger, with

that great mass of brown beard. He is a tiger."

Frank, leaning his arms on the stile, scanned the movements of the "Tiger." The Tiger was at some distance, and he could not see him clearly. A thin tiger of middle height, and apparently approaching middle age, dressed in a suit of grey, with a slouching hat on his brows, and a fine brown beard. But the Tiger, whomsoever he might be, appeared to entertain no hostile intentions for the present moment, and was strolling leisurely in the direction of the huts. Presently Frank spoke.

"He is well away now, Charley: too far to distinguish you, even should he turn round. There's no danger."

Charley came out from the hedge, and took up his former position at the extreme corner of the stile, where he was partially hidden. Every vestige of colour had forsaken his face. He was but young yet: not much more than a boy, as Frank said: and unfamiliar with these things.

"I saw him yesterday for the first time," said he to Frank. "I chanced to be standing here, as we are now, and he was walking towards me across the common. While won-

dering, in a lazy kind of way, who he was and what he wanted here, a great rush of fear came over me. It occurred to me that he might be a sheriff's officer. Why the idea should flash on me in that sudden manner—and the fear—I cannot tell; but it did. I made the best of my way indoors, and did not stir out again. This morning I said to myself what a simpleton I had been—that I had no grounds for fearing the man, except that he was a stranger, and that my own mind was full of bother; and I came out, all bravery. The first person I saw, upon proceeding to cross this stile, was he; just in the same spot, near to the trees, where I saw him yesterday; and the rush of fear came over me again. It's of no good your laughing, Frank: I can't help it: I never was a coward before."

"I was not laughing. Did he see you?"

"Not to-day, I think. Yesterday he did, looked at me keenly; and here he is again in the same spot! I am sure he is looking for me. If I were up in funds, I'd be off somewhere and stay away."

"What about home—and Oxford?"

"There's the worst of it."

“ And you could not stop away for ever.”

“ For ever, no. But, you see, that money may turn up any day, and put all things straight.”

“ Well, you may be mistaken in the man, Charley; and I hope you are.”

William Stane was at home for these Easter holidays, and still the shadow of Alice Raynor. It chanced that this same afternoon he and Alice encountered the Tiger—as, from that day, Charles and Frank both called him in private. Strolling along side by side under the brilliant afternoon sun, in that silence which is most eloquent of love, with the birds singing melodiously above them, and the very murmur of the waving trees speaking a sweet language to their hearts, they came upon him—this stranger in grey—sitting on the stump of a tree. The trees, mostly beeches, were thick about there; the path branched off sharply at a right angle, and they did not see him until they were close up: in fact, William Stane had to make a step or two of *détour* to pass without touching him. Perhaps it was his unexpected appearance in that spot, or that it was not usual to see strangers, or else his peculiar look, with the slouching hat and the bushy beard;

but certain it was that he especially attracted their attention ; somewhat of their curiosity.

“ What a strange-looking man ! ” exclaimed Alice, under her breath, when they had gone some distance. “ Did you not think so, William ? ”

“ Queerish. Does he live here ? I wonder if he is aware that he is trespassing ? ”

“ Papa lets anyone come on the grounds that likes to,” replied Alice. “ He is a stranger. I never saw him before.”

“ Oh, it must be one of the Easter excursionists. Escaped from smoky London to enjoy a day or two of the pure air of the Kentish Wolds.”

“ As you have done,” said she.

“ As I have done. I only wish, Alice, I could enjoy it oftener.”

The words and the tender tone alike bore a precious meaning to her ear. His eyes met hers, and lingered there.

“ I am getting on excellently well,” he continued. “ By the end of this year, I make no doubt I shall be justified in—in quitting my chambers and taking a house. Perhaps before that.”

“Look at that spray of hawthorn!” exclaimed Alice, darting to a hedge they were now passing, for she knew too well what the words implied. “Has it not come out early! It is in full bloom.”

“Shall I gather it for you?”

“No. It would be a pity. It looks so well there, and everybody that passes by can enjoy it. Do you know, I never see the flowering hawthorn but I think of that good old Scotch song, ‘Ye banks and braes.’ I don’t know why.”

“Let us sit down here,” said he, as they came to a rustic seat amid the trees. “And now, Alice, if you would sing that good old song, the charm would be perfect.”

She laughed. “What charm?”

“The charm of—everything. Of the day and hour, of the white and pink may budding in the hedges, of the wild flowers we crush with our feet, of the blue sky and the green trees, of the sunshine and the shade, of the singing birds and the murmuring leaves, and of—you.”

Not another word from either of them just yet. William Stane had let his hand fall on hers. Her head was slightly turned from him,

her cheeks were glowing, her heart was beating : it was again another interval of that most sweet and eloquent silence. Alice had taken off her hat, which hung by the strings from her arm, and her bright brown hair looked almost golden in the sunlight.

“ Won’t you begin, Alice ? The little birds ‘ warbling through the flowering thorn ’ are waiting to hear you. So am I.”

And as if she had no power to resist his will, she began at once, without one dissenting murmur, and sang the song to the end. Save for the birds above them, there were no listeners : no rover was likely to be near that solitary spot. Her voice was sweet, but not loud ; every syllable was spoken distinctly. To sit there for ever, side by side, and not be disturbed, would be a very Eden.

“ And my false lover stole my rose,
But ah ! he left the thorn wi’ me.”

Scarcely had the echoing melody of the last lines died away, when the sound of unexpected footsteps was heard approaching, and there advanced into view a woman well known to Alice ; one Sarah Croft, the wife of a man

who was employed on the estate. They lived in one of the most miserable dwellings on the common, but were civil and quiet; somewhat independent in manner, but never joining in the semi-rebellion that reigned. She looked miserably poor. Her blue cotton gown, though clean, was in rags, her old shawl would hardly hang together, the black bonnet on her head might have been used to frighten the crows. She dropped a curtsey and was passing onwards, when Alice inquired after her sick children.

“They be no better, Miss Raynor, thank ye,” she answered, halting in front of the bench and standing to face those on it. “The little one, she be took sick now, as well as the two boys. I’ve got a fine time on’t.”

“Why don’t you have a doctor to them?” said Alice.

“More nor a week ago I went up to the parish and telled them I must have a doctor to my children: but he never come till yesterday.”

“What did he say?”

“I’ll tell ye what he said, Miss Raynor, if ye like. He said doctors and doctors’ stuff was o’ no good, so long as the houses remained

what they was—pes-ti-fe-rus. That was the word, pes-ti-fe-rus. I should not have remembered it, though, but for Jetty's lodger repeating of the very self-same word to me a minute or two ago. I've just passed him. He's a-sitting down yonder under the beeches."

Alice, as well as William Stane, instantly recalled the man in grey they had seen sitting there. "Jetty's lodger!" repeated Alice. "Who is he?"

"Some stranger that's staying in the place, Miss Raynor. He come into it one morning, a week ago, and took Jetty's rooms. They was to let."

"What is he staying here for?"

"To pry into people's business, I think," replied the woman. "He's always about, here, there, and everywhere; one can't stir out many yards but one meets him. Saturday last, he walks right into our place without as much as knocking; and there he turns hisself round and about, looking at the rotten floor and the dripping walls, and sniffing at the bad smell that's always there, just as if he had as much right inside as a king. 'Who is your landlord?' says he, 'and does he know what a den

this is ?' So I told him that our landlord was Major Raynor at Eagles' Nest, and that he did know, but that nothing was done for us. He have gone, I hear, into some o' the other houses as well."

The woman's tone was quite civil, but there could be no doubt that, in her independence, she was talking at Alice as the daughter of Major Raynor.

"As I passed him now he asked me whether my sick children was better—just as you have, Miss Raynor. I told him they was worse. 'And worse they will be, and never better, and all the rest of you too,' says he, 'as long as you inhabit the mpes-ti-fe-rus dens !' "

Alice drew her head up in cold disdain, vouchsafing no further word, and feeling very angry at the implied reproach. The woman dropped a slight curtsey again, and went on her way.

"How insolent they all are !" exclaimed Alice to Mr. Stane. "That Sarah Croft would have been abusive in another moment."

"Their cottages are bad," returned the young man, after a pause. "Could nothing be done, I wonder, to make them a little better ?"

“It is papa’s business, not mine,” remarked Alice in semi-resentment. “And the idea of that strange man presuming to interfere! I wonder what he means by it?”

“I do not suppose he intends it as interference: he is looking about him by way of filling up his time: it must hang rather monotonously on his hands down here, I presume, away from his books and ledgers,” remarked Mr. Stane. “It is the way of the world, Alice; people must be busy-bodies and look into what does not concern them, for curiosity’s sake. Nay, just a few moments longer,” he said, for she had put her hat on, and was rising to depart. “To-morrow I shall have no such pleasant and peaceful seat to linger in; I shall not have you. How delightful it all is!”

And so, the disturbing interruption forgotten, Alice let fall her hat again, and they sat on in the balmy air, under the blue of the smiling sky, with the green foliage about them springing into life and beauty, type of another Life that must succeed our own winter, and listening to the little songsters overhead warbling their joyous songs. Can none of us, grey now with care, and work, and years, remember just such

an hour spent in our own sweet spring-time ? —when all things around spoke to our hearts in one unmixed love-strain of melodious harmony, and the future looked like a charmed scroll that could but bring intense happiness in the unrolling ?

“ Take my arm, Alice,” he said in a half whisper, when they at length rose to return.

She did take it, her face and her heart one hot glow. Took it timidly and with much self-consciousness, never having been in the habit of taking it, or he of offering it. Her hand trembled as it lay within his arm ; each might have heard the other’s heart beat. And so in the bliss of this, their first love-dream, they sauntered home through the grounds, choosing pleasant glades and mossy by-ways ; and arrived to find Eagles’ Nest in a commotion.

Mrs. Frank Raynor had been taken seriously and unexpectedly ill. Doctors were sent for ; servants ran about. And William Stane said farewell, and went home from an afternoon that would ever remain as a green spot on his memory. It was his last day of holiday.

With the morning, Daisy lay in great danger.

The illness, not expected for a month or two, had come on suddenly. In one sense of the word the event was over, but not the danger; and the baby, not destined to see the light, was gone.

It was perhaps unfortunate that on this same morning Frank should receive an urgent summons to Trennach. Edina wrote. Her father was very ill; ill, it was feared, unto death; and he most earnestly begged Frank to travel to him with all speed, for he had urgent need of seeing him. Edina said that, unless her father should rally, three or four days were the utmost limit of life accorded to him by the doctors: she therefore begged of Frank to lose no time in obeying the summons; and she added that her father desired her to say the journey should be no cost to him.

“What a distressing thing!” cried Frank, in blank dismay, showing the letter to the Major. “I cannot go. It is impossible that I can go while Daisy lies in this state.”

“Good gracious!” said the Major, rubbing his head, as he was sure to do on any emergency. “Well, I suppose you can’t, my boy. Poor Hugh!”

“How can I! Suppose I were to go, and—and she died?”

“Yes, to be sure. You must wait until she is in less danger. I hope with all my heart Hugh will rally. And Daisy too.”

Frank sat down and wrote a few words to his uncle, telling him why he could not start that day, but that he would do so the moment his wife's state allowed it. He wrote more fully, but to the same effect, to Edina. Perhaps on the morrow, he added. The morrow might bring better things.

But on the morrow Daisy was even worse. A high fever had set in. Frank wrote again to Trennach, but he could not leave Eagles' Nest. Some days went on; days of peril: Daisy was hovering between life and death. And on the first day that a very faint indication of improvement was perceptible and the medical men said she might now live, that there was a bare chance of it, but no certainty; that same day the final news came from Trennach, and it was too late for Frank to take the journey. Dr. Raynor was dead.

The tidings came by letter from Edina: written to Frank. It was but a short note,

giving a few particulars. Within this note, however, was a thicker letter, sealed and marked "Private." Frank chanced to be alone at the moment, and opened it with some curiosity. On a single sheet of enveloping paper, enclosing a letter from Dr. Raynor, were the following lines from Edina.

"My poor father was so anxious to see you, dear Frank, at the last, that it disturbed his peace. Of course you could not come, under the circumstances; he saw that; but he said over and over again, and groaned when he said it, that your not coming was most unfortunate, and to you might be disastrous. At the different hours in the day and night when a train was due, nothing could exceed the eagerness with which he looked out for you, and his restlessness when it grew too late to admit of hope that you had come. The day before he died, when he knew the end was approaching and he should not live to see you, he caused himself to be propped up in bed, and had pen and ink brought that he might write to you. He watched me seal up the letter when it was finished, and charged me to send it to you when all was over,

but to be sure to enclose it privately, and to tell you to open and read it when you were alone.
E. R."

Sending Edina's short note of the demise to Major Raynor by a servant, Frank carried these lines and the Doctor's letter to his chamber: thereby obeying injunctions, but nevertheless wondering at them very much. What could his uncle have to say to him necessitating secrecy? Breaking the seal, he ran his eyes over the almost illegible lines that the dying hand had traced.

"My dear Nephew Frank,—I wanted to see you. I ought not to have put it off so long. But this closing scene has come upon me somewhat suddenly; and now I cannot write all I ought to, and should wish: and I must, of necessity, write abruptly.

"*Are you conscious of being in any danger?* Have you committed any act that could bring you under the arm of the law? If so, take care of yourself. A dreadful rumour was whispered in my ears by Andrew Float, connecting you with the hitherto unexplained fate of

Bell the miner. I charged Float to be silent—and I think he will be, for he is a kind and good man, and only spoke to me that I might put you on your guard—and I questioned Blase Pellet, from whom Float had heard it. Pellet was sullen, obstinate, would not say much ; but he did say he could hang you, and *would* do it if you offended him or put yourself in his way. I could not get anything more from him, and it was not a subject that I cared to minutely inquire into, or could pursue openly.

“ My boy, you know best what grounds there may be for this half-breathed accusation, whether any or none. I have hardly had a minute’s peace since it reached me, now three weeks ago : in fact, it has, I believe, brought on the crisis with me somewhat before it would otherwise have come. At one moment I say to myself, It is a malicious invention, an infamous lie ; I know my boy Frank too well to believe this, or anything else against him : the next moment I shudder at the tale and at the possibility of what may have been enacted. Perhaps through passion—or accident—or—I grow confused : I know not what I would say.

“ Oh, my boy, my nephew, my dear brother

Henry's only child ! my heart is aching with dismay and doubt. I do believe you are innocent of all intention to harm ; but—my sight is growing dim. *Take care of yourself.* Hide yourself if need be (and you best know whether there be need, or not) from Blase Pellet. It is he who would be your enemy. I see it ; and Andrew Float sees it ; though we know not why or wherefore. In any obscure nook of this wide world, shelter yourself from him. Don't let him know where you are. If he does indeed hold power in his hand, it may be your only chance of safety : *he said it was.* I can write no more. God bless and help you ! Farewell. Your loving and anxious Uncle Hugh."

Frank Raynor may have drawn many a deep breath in his life, but never so deep a one as he drew now. Mechanically he folded the letter and placed it in an inner pocket.

"Are you there, sir ?"

The question came from outside the door, in the voice of one of the servants. Frank unbolted it.

"Lunch is on the table, sir."

“Is it?” returned Frank, half bewildered. “I don’t want any to-day, James. Just say so. I am going out for a stroll.”

The letters from Cornwall were never delivered at Eagles’ Nest until the mid-day post. Frank took his hat, and went out; bending his steps whithersoever they chose to take him, so that he might be alone.

Strolling on mechanically, in deep thought, he plunged into a dark coppice, and asked himself what he was to do. The letter had disturbed him in no common degree. It had taken all his spirit, all his elasticity out of him: and that was saying a great deal of Frank Raynor.

“I wish I could hang Blase Pellet!” he burst forth in his torment and perplexity. “He deserves it richly. To disturb my poor uncle with his malicious tongue! Sneak!”

But Frank was unconsciously unjust. It was not Blase Pellet who had disturbed Dr. Raynor. At least, he had not done it intentionally. To do Blase justice, he was vexed that the Doctor should have heard it, for he held him in great respect and would not willingly have grieved him. In an evil moment,

when Blase had taken rather more to drink than was quite necessary—a very rare occurrence with him, almost unprecedented—he had dropped the dangerous words to Andrew Float.

“Yes, I must hide myself from him, as my uncle says,” resumed Frank, referring to the advice in the letter. “There’s no help for it. He could be a dangerous enemy. For my own sake ; for—everybody’s sake, I must keep myself in some shelter where he cannot find me.”

Emerging from the coppice to the open ground, Frank lifted his eyes, and saw, standing near him, the man in grey, whom they had christened the Tiger. He was leaning against the tree with bent head and folded arms, apparently in deep thought. All in a moment, just as a personal fear of him had rushed over Charles, so did it now rush over Frank. His brain grew dizzy.

For the notion somehow struck him that the man was not wanting Charles at all. But that he might be an emissary of Blase Pellet’s, come hither to look after himself and his movements.

CHAPTER IV.

AT JETTY'S.

JOHN JETTY was the local carpenter. A master in a small way. His workshop was in the village, Grassmere, hard by Eagles' Nest ; his dwelling-house was on the common, already told of. In this house he lived with his sister, Esther Jetty ; a staid woman, more than ten years older than himself : he being a smart, talkative, active, and very intelligent man of two or three-and-thirty. The house, which they rented of Major Raynor, was larger than they required, and Esther Jetty was in the habit of letting a sitting and bed-room in it when she could find a desirable lodger to occupy them.

On the Thursday in Passion Week, when she was in the midst of her house-cleaning for Easter, and in the act of polishing the outside of the spare sitting-room window, in which hung a card with " Lodgings " written on it, she

noticed a man in grey clothes ; who was sauntering up from the direction of the railway station, an over-coat on his arm, and a good-sized black bag in his hand.

“Some traveller from London,” decided Esther Jetty, turning round to gaze at him ; for a stranger in the quiet place was quite an event. “Come down here to spend Easter.”

The thought had scarcely passed her mind, when, somewhat to her surprise, the stranger turned aside from the path, walked direct towards her, and took off his hat while he spoke.

“Have you lodgings to let ?” he asked. “I see a card in your window.”

“Yes, sir, I have ; two rooms,” said she, respectfully, for the courtesy of lifting his hat had favourably impressed her, and the tones of his voice were courteous also, not at all like those of an individual in humble station. “What a fine beard !” she thought to herself. “How smooth, and curly, and silky it is !”

“I want to stay in this place for a few days,” continued he, “and am looking for lodgings. Perhaps yours would suit me.”

Esther Jetty hastened to show the rooms.

They were small ; but clean, comfortable, and prettily furnished : and the rent was ten shillings per week.

“ It is not too much, sir, at this season of the year, when the summer’s coming on,” she hastened to say, lest the amount should be objected to. “ I always try to make my lodgers comfortable, and cook for them and wait on them well. The last I had—a sick young woman and her little girl—stayed here all the winter and spring : they only left three weeks ago.”

The stranger’s answer was to put down a sovereign. “ That’s the first week’s rent in advance,” said he. “ With the change you can get in a couple of mutton chops for my dinner. I shall not give you much trouble.” And he took possession of the rooms at once.

As the days had gone on, only a few as yet, Esther Jetty found that his promise of not giving much trouble was true. She had never had a lodger who gave less. He lived very simply. His dinner generally consisted of two mutton chops ; his other food chiefly of eggs and bread-and-butter. It was glorious weather ; and he passed nearly all his time out of doors.

Not a nook or corner of the immediate neighbourhood escaped his keen eye, his (as it seemed) insatiable inquisitiveness. He penetrated to the small dwelling-houses, good and bad; asking questions of the inmates, making friends with them. He would stand by the half hour together side by side with the out-door labourers, saying the land wanted this and that done to it, and demanding why it was not done. But, there could be no doubt that he was even more curious in regard to the Raynor family, and especially to its eldest son, than he was as to the land and its labourers: and these latter soon noticed that if by chance Charles Raynor came into sight, the stranger would stroll off, apparently without aim, towards him; and when Charles turned away, as he invariably did, the man followed in his wake at a distance. In short, it would seem that his chief business was to look in a surreptitious way after some of the inmates of Eagles' Nest; and that his visitings of the land and the cottages, and his consequent disparaging remarks thereupon, were probably but taken up to pass away the time. These opinions, however, grew upon people later, rather than at first.

Easter week passed. On the following Sunday the stranger went to church ; and, after the service began, took up a place whence he had full view of the large square pew belonging to Eagles' Nest. On Easter Sunday he had sat at the back of the church, out of sight. Charles, Alice, and Frank were in the pew to-day, with the governess and little Kate : Mrs. Raynor was at home with Frank's wife, then lying in her dangerous illness ; the Major had not come. This was two days before they received news of Dr. Raynor's death. Charles was rendered miserably uncomfortable during the service by the presence of the Tiger opposite to him—as might be read by anyone in the secret of his fears, and was read by Frank. Never did Charles raise his eyes but he saw those of the Tiger fixed on him : in fact, the Tiger studied the faces in Major Raynor's pew more attentively than he studied his book.

“He is taking toll of me—that he may know me again : I don't suppose he did know me before, or his work would have been done, and over,” thought Charles. “What a precious idiot I was to come to church ! Thank heaven, he can't touch me on a Sunday.”

And when the service was over, the Tiger coolly stood in the churchyard and watched the family pass him, looking keenly at Charles.

He had in like manner watched them into church. From a shady nook in the same churchyard, he had stood, himself unseen, looking at the congregation as they filed in. When the bell had ceased, and the last person seemed to have entered, then the Tiger followed, and put himself in the best place for seeing the Raynors. It was, however, the first and last time Charles was annoyed in a like manner: on subsequent Sundays, the Tiger, if he went to church at all, was lost amidst the general congregation.

On this same Sunday evening, John Jetty found himself invited to take a pipe with his lodger. They sat in the arbour in the back garden, amid the herbs, the spring cabbages, and the early flowers. Jetty never wanted any inducement to talk. He was not of a wary nature by any means, and did not observe how skilfully and easily the thread of his discourse was this evening turned on the Raynors and their affairs. No man in the

place could have supplied more correct information to a stranger than he. He was often at work in the house, was particularly intimate with Lamb, the butler, who had lived with Mrs. Atkinson; as had two or three of the other head servants; and they had the family politics at their fingers' ends. Mrs. Raynor had brought one servant from Spring Lawn; the nurse; the woman knew all about her branch of the family, Frank included, and had no objection to relate news for the new people's benefit, who in their turn repeated it to Jetty. Consequently Jetty was as much at home in the family archives as the Raynors were themselves.

"Is the estate entailed on the Major's son?" questioned the Tiger, in a pause of the conversation.

"I don't think it's strictly entailed on him, sir, but of course he'll have it," was Jetty's answer. "Indeed, it is no secret that the Major has made a will and left it to him. Mrs. Atkinson bequeathed it entirely to the Major: she didn't entail it."

"Who is Mrs. Atkinson?" asked the Tiger.

"Why, that was the possessor of the estate

before him," cried Jetty, in an accent full of surprise. To him, familiar with Eagles' Nest and its people for many years, it sounded strange to hear anybody ask who Mrs. Atkinson was. "She was an old lady, sir, sister to the Major, and it all belonged to her. He only came into it last year when she died."

"Had she no sons?"

"No, sir; not any. I never heard that she did have any. Her husband was a banker in London; he bought this place a good many years ago. After his death Mrs. Atkinson entirely lived in it."

"Then—it is sure to come to the Major's eldest son?"

"As sure as sure can be," affirmed Jetty, replenishing his pipe at his lodger's invitation. "The Major would not be likely to will it away to anybody else."

"I saw two young men in the pew to-day: one quite young, scarcely out of his teens, I should say; the other some years older. Which of them was the son?"

"Oh, the youngest. The other is a nephew; Mr. Frank Raynor. He is very good-looking, he is: such a pleasant face, with nice blue

eyes and bright hair. Not but what Mr. Charles is good-looking, too, in a different way."

"Mr. Charles looks to me like an insolent puppy," freely commented the Tiger. "And has a haughty air with it: as though he were king of the country and all the rest of us his subjects." The probability was that Charles had honoured the staring Tiger with all the haughty and insolent looks he could call up throughout the service.

"Well, he is a bit haughty sometimes," acknowledged the carpenter. "Folks have found him so. He is just home from Oxford, sir, and I fancy he has been spending pretty freely there: Lamb just gave a hint to me. But if you want pleasant words and cordial manners, you must go to the nephew, Mr. Frank."

"What is *he* doing here?" dryly asked the stranger, after a pause.

"He is a doctor, sir."

"A doctor? Is he in practice here?"

"Oh, no. He is waiting to set up in London, and staying down here till he does it."

"What is he waiting for?"

“Well, sir, for money, I guess. The Raynors are open-natured people and don’t scruple to talk of things before their servants, so that there’s not much but what’s known. When the late Mrs. Atkinson died, a good deal of stir arose about some money of hers that could not be found: thousands and thousands of pounds, it was said. It could neither be found, nor the papers relating to it.”

“Is it not found?” asked the Tiger, stroking his silky beard.

“Not yet. The Major is anxiously waiting for it: not a day passes, Lamb says, but he is sure to remark that it may turn up the next. Mr. Frank Raynor is to have some of this money to set him up in practice.”

“Did Mrs. Atkinson not leave any money to him? — He must have been a relation of hers?”

“Oh, yes, she left money to him. I forget what it was now—a good sum, though.”

“Why does he not set up with that?” questioned the Tiger, wonderingly.

“He has spent it, sir. He and his young wife went abroad, and lived away, I suppose. Any way, the money’s gone, Lamb says.

But Mr. Frank's as nice a fellow as ever lived."

"Did he——" began the stranger, and then broke off suddenly, as if in doubt whether or not to put the question: but in a moment went on firmly. "Did he ever live at Trennach in Cornwall?"

"Trennach?" repeated Jetty, considering. "Yes, sir, I think that's where he did live. Yes, I'm sure that is the name. He was in practice there with another uncle, one Dr. Raynor, and might have stopped there and come into the practice after him. A rare good opening for him, it's said: but he preferred to come elsewhere."

"Preferred to travel and see the world," spoke the stranger, cynically. "Are Major Raynor's revenues good ones?"

"Well, sir, I know in Mrs. Atkinson's time this estate was said to bring in a clear two thousand a year. And Major Raynor had of course an income before he came into it: but that, I hear, is only an annuity and goes from him at his death."

"Then, if his revenues amount to that—from two to three thousand a year—how is it

that he does not do the repairs necessary on the estate, and keep up the land, and help to ameliorate the condition of the wretched serfs about him ? ” demanded the stranger, staring at Jetty.

Jetty shook his head. “ I don’t think it is the will that’s wanted,” replied he. “ The Major seems to be thoroughly good-hearted : and Lamb says he is one of the easiest masters he could ever wish to serve. No, it is not the will, sir, that is wanting.”

“ What is it then ? The money ? ”

Jetty nodded his head in the affirmative. “ They live at such a rate, you see, sir : and it is said the Major had a lot of back debts to pay when he came here. Altogether, he has nothing to spare.”

“ Then he ought to have,” asserted the Tiger, tapping thoughtfully at his pipe, that lay on the table. “ Does he never visit his tenements and see into things for himself ? ”

“ No, sir, not he. ’Twould be too much exertion for him. He can’t walk about much ; never comes beyond his own garden gates, never.”

The Tiger paused. “ This young Frank

Raynor's wife, who is lying ill: had she no money?"

"No, sir. Her family have plenty, I expect, for they live at some grand place down in Cornwall. But she has none. It was a runaway match that she and Mr. Frank made, so she couldn't expect any."

The Tiger nodded his head two or three times, as if in self-commune. "I see," said he: "these Raynors are an improvident set altogether. Thoughtless, cruel, selfish, upstart, and purse-proud. From what little I have noticed during the few days I have been here, that is the impression they make upon me: and what you say confirms it."

He took his pipe off the table as he spoke, knocked the ashes out of it, and put it in its case. An intimation, John Jetty thought, that their social hour was at an end: and he went away, respectfully wishing good evening to his lodger.

Easter was over; and the time for going back to Oxford for the coming term was past. Charles Raynor had not gone to keep it. He had to confess to the Major that he did not

care to go back without a good sum of money, apart from his allowance; he might have said dared not go. It was not convenient to find the sum: so the Major decided that Charles must miss that one term, and keep the next.

The weeks went on. Charles had in a degree got over his dread of the Tiger—who still remained on in his lodgings—for it was now very evident that if that mysterious man's mission at Grassmere were to take him into custody for debt, it might have been accomplished ere this. Nevertheless, so strongly do first impressions retain their hold upon us, his dislike of the man continued in all its force.

But, as Charles's alarm subsided, Frank's increased. The more evident it became that Charles was not the Tiger's object, the more surely did it seem to Frank that he, himself, was. It was a fear he could not speak of, but his secret uneasiness was great. Neither he nor Frank could fail to see that the man's daily business did appear to be that of watching the movements of the Raynor family, especially those of the two young men. Not of watching offensively, but in a quiet, easy, unobtrusive manner. Frank fully believed

that the man was a secret emissary of Blase Pellet's, sent there to see that he did not escape his toils.

Major Raynor had never seen this man : and Frank and Charles, each for his own private and individual reasons, had refrained from speaking of him. Of late the Major had chiefly confined himself to the gardens immediately attached to his house, not going beyond them. There were two reasons for this : the one was, that he had now grown so very stout as to render walking a trouble to him, and when he did go out it was in a carriage ; the other was, that he never went beyond his inner fence but he was sure to meet one, or other, or more, of those wretched malcontents ; who thought nothing of accosting him and asking him to do this, and to do that. So matters remained pretty stationary : the Major indolently nursing himself in his easy-chair on the lawn ; the young men enjoying their private discomforts ; and the Tiger peering into every conceivable spot open to him, and making himself better acquainted with the general shortcomings of the Raynors, in regard to the estate and the people on it, than they themselves were.

It was Saturday evening. Alice sat at the piano in the drawing-room, singing songs by twilight, to the intense gratification of William Stane, who stood over her. The young barrister frequently ran down home the last day in the week, to remain over the Sunday with his family. As a matter of course, he spent a great deal of the interlude at Eagles' Nest. The Major sat back in the room, dozing; Charles was listlessly turning over a lot of music. Eagles' Nest had given an afternoon-party that day; a fashionable kettledrum; but the guests had departed after the early tea.

"I can scarcely see," said Alice, as her lover placed a new song before her. She was in the dress she had worn at the entertainment: a black gauze trimmed with white ribbons, with silver bracelets and other silver ornaments, and looked charmingly lovely. They were in mourning for Dr. Raynor.

"I'll ring for the lights," said Charles. "I can't see, either."

The speaking had aroused the Major. "We don't want lights yet," said he. "It is pleasanter as it is."

"Sing the songs you know by heart," whis-

pered William Stane. "After all, they are the best and sweetest."

Presently Lamb came in of his own accord, with the wax lights. The Major, waking up again, made no objection now, but forbade the shutters to be closed.

"It's a pity to shut out that moonlight," said he. Not that the moonlight could have benefited him much, for in another minute he was asleep again. He had grown strangely drowsy of late. So the room was lighted up, and the moonlight streamed in at the window.

Frank entered. He had been sitting upstairs with his wife, who was still very ill. In fact, this had been an unusually prolonged and critical sickness. Taking up his position at the window, Frank listened silently to the song then in progress. Charles came up to him.

"How is she to night, Frank?"

"No better. If—Look there!" he suddenly exclaimed, his voice sunk to a whisper.

Some one had walked deliberately by, outside the window, gazing at what there might be to see within the room. Was it the Tiger? Frank's heart beat nineteen to the dozen.

"Did you see him, Charley?"

“Who was it?” whispered Charley.

“I’m hardly sure; he passed so quickly. The Tiger, I conclude. Yes, I feel sure of it. I know the cut of his hat.”

“What consummate impudence, to be trespassing here!”

Both of them left the room, made their way to a side door, and looked out. No one was in sight; and yet, whomsoever it was that had passed must have come that way.

“He has turned back,” said Charley: and as he spoke he advanced cautiously amid the shrubs, that skirted that end of the house, to look round at the front.

No. Not a soul was to be seen or heard. Had he scampered straight across the lawn and made off? It seemed like it.

“I wonder what it’s coming to!” cried Charley. “Could we have him warned off the estate, I wonder?”

“Hardly,” spoke Frank in a dreamy tone.

“I *cannot* think what he does here,” exclaimed Charles. “If he had any evil intentions, he—he would have acted upon them before now.”

“You mean as to yourself, Charley. Rely

upon it, you are out of the matter altogether."

"Who's in it, then?"

"Myself, perhaps."

The answer was given quietly and easily: but there was something in its tone that kept Charles from regarding it as a jest.

"*You* are not in debt, are you, Frank," he cried hastily.

"Not that I know of."

"I declare for the moment I thought you must be in earnest," said Charles, relieved. "It is uncommonly strange what the fellow can want here!"

Frank said no more. They paced about for some time, without their hats, in the bright moonlight, talking of other matters. In crossing the side path to the house, they met Jetty the carpenter coming away from it, a frail in his hand, out of which a saw was sticking upright. The man had been doing some repairs indoors.

"Jetty," cried Charles, accosting him, and speaking upon impulse, "who is that man that lodges with you? The fellow with the great brown beard, who goes about in a suit of grey."

“ I don’t know who he is in particular, sir,” replied Jetty. “ He is a very quiet lodger, and pays regular.”

“ What is he down here for ? ”

“ Well, I think it is for his health,” said Jetty. “ He told us he had not been well for some time before he came to Grassmere.”

“ What is his name ? ”

“ And that I don’t know, sir——”

“ Not know his name ? ” interrupted Charles, impatiently.

“ Well, sir, I was going to say that I don’t know it from him. He is uncommonly close as to his own affairs : though he likes well enough to hear about other people’s. As to his name, he did not mention it when he first came in, and my sister said she did not like to ask him. But——”

“ I never knew such a thing as not knowing a lodger’s name,” went on Charles, getting excited over it, while Frank stood by in perfect silence. “ Does not the man get any letters ? ”

“ Yes, sir. But they don’t come to the house ; they are left at the post-office in Grassmere, and he fetches them himself. The other

morning, when Esther went into his parlour, he was reading one of these letters, and the cover of it lay on the table, address upwards. She was not quick enough to read the name on it, for he took it up, but she saw it was a short name and began with a G."

"Grim, no doubt," said Charles.

"'Mr. G——, Post Office, Grassmere.' That was it, sir."

"I must say I should like to know who he is and what he is doing here," continued Charles. "Good night, Jetty."

Jetty gave an answering good night, touched his cap, and went away with rapid strides. Drawing near to his home, he overtook the Tiger, sauntering along with slow steps.

"You are late to-night, Jetty."

"Yes, sir," replied the carpenter, decreasing his pace to that of the speaker. "I had to put some new shelves into one of the kitchen cupboards at Eagles' Nest, and it has taken me longer than I thought for."

"All going on well there?" continued the Tiger.

"First rate," said Jetty. "They had a great party this afternoon; one of those new-

fashioned kettledrums. Such an entertainment it was ! such beautiful dresses ! ”

“ I thought the son, Charles Raynor, was keeping his terms at Oxford,” resumed the Tiger, after giving himself time to digest the information touching the kettledrum. “ Why is he not keeping this term ? ”

“ Well, sir,” said Jetty, beginning to answer in his usual favourite mode, and dropping his voice to a low key, though they were quite alone on the common, “ I believe Mr. Charles can’t show his face at Oxford until he is better up in funds ; so he is omitting this term.”

“ Debts—eh ? ” cried the Tiger, but without any appearance of surprise. “ And the Major has not the funds to spare for them ? ”

“ Well, sir, that’s to be inferred.”

“ Meanwhile the lad fills up his days and hours at home with dancing, and smoking, and kettledrums, and other good-for-nothing amusements. *That’s* a nice way to spend one’s life ! ”

“ Young men will be young men, sir—though they are but lads,” spoke Jetty, deprecatingly.

“Yes ; young men will be young men : some of them will, at any rate,” came the half-mocking retort. “But in all my days I never saw a young man who appeared more likely to go straight down to ruin than Charles Raynor.”

CHAPTER V.

WORSE THAN PEAS AND HORSEHAIR.

MAJOR RAYNOR sat in his favourite seat on the lawn at Eagles' Nest, at drowsy peace with himself and with the world. Of late the Major had always been drowsy : morning, noon, and night, no matter what company he was in, he might be seen nodding with closed eyelids. Frank, as a medical man, did not like the signs. He spoke to his uncle of the necessity of arousing himself, of taking more exercise, of indulging somewhat less in the good luncheons and dinners. The Major made an effort to obey : for two days he actually walked about the lawn for twenty minutes, refused two rich entrées, took at each meal one glass less of wine. But the efforts ended there, and on the third day the Major gave reformation up as a bad job.

" It's of no use, Frank, my boy. You young folks can be upon the run all day if you choose,

and live upon bread and cheese and table beer ; but we old ones require ease ; we can't be put about."

So the Major sat at ease this day as usual, lazily thinking, and dropping into a semi-doze. A letter had been received that morning from Edina, in answer to an invitation from Major and Mrs. Raynor to come and make her home with them now she was alone in the world. Edina declined it for the present. She was staying at Trennach parsonage with Mr. and Mrs. Pine : her plans were not decided upon ; but the clergyman and his wife would not yet spare her. She had many affairs to settle at Trennach. Mr. Hatman had taken to the practice, as it was arranged he should do, and to the house ; but Edina could not leave the place at present. She hoped to pay Eagles' Nest a visit in the course of the summer.

Thinking of this, and subsiding into the semi-doze, sat the Major. The hum of the insects sounded in his ears, the scent of the rich flowering hawthorn was heavy in the air. Though not yet summer by the calendar, for May was still reigning, the season was unusually premature, and the weather was, to all intents

and purposes, that of summer. Bees were sipping at the honey blossoms, butterflies fluttered from flower to flower. All nature seemed to conduce to repose, and—the Major was soon fast asleep, and choking as though he were being strangled.

“You are wanted, if you please, sir.”

The words aroused him. Opening his eyes, and sitting upright in his chair, he saw his butler by his side.

“What do you say, Lamb? Wanted? Who is it?”

“Sir Philip Stane, sir. He is in the drawing-room.”

The Major took a draught of his champagne cup, standing on the table by his side. Which cup, it must be confessed, was much more innocent than its name would imply. A quart or two of it would not hurt anybody: and the Major was always thirsty. Crossing the lawn, he went into the drawing-room. Sir Philip Stane, a little man with a white shirt-frill, a cold face, and a remarkably composed manner, rose at his entrance. Major Raynor shook hands with him in his hearty way, and they sat down together.

For some few minutes the conversation turned on general topics ; but soon the knight gave the Major to understand that he had come to speak upon a particular subject : the attachment of his son to Miss Raynor.

“ It has for some time been observable that they are thinking of one another,” remarked he.

“ Well, yes, I suppose it has,” said the Major. “ We have noticed it here.”

“ William is getting on fairly well ; he calculates that he will make at least seven hundred pounds this year. Quite enough, he thinks, to begin housekeeping upon, with help. With help, Major.”

“ I should have thought it just unbounded riches in my marrying days,” observed the Major.

“ William considers that he would be justified in setting up a home, provided he can be met,” continued Sir Philip in his deliberate, sententious way, presenting a very contrast to the Major’s impulsive heartiness. “ Young people do not of course expect to begin as they may hope to end : riches must come by degrees.”

“ Quite right,” said the Major.

“And therefore, with a view to the consideration of the matter—to finally deciding whether my son may be justified, or not, in settling this year—I have come to ask you, Major Raynor, what portion you intend to bestow upon your daughter.”

“Not any,” replied the plain-speaking Major. “I have none to bestow.”

Sir Philip looked at him blankly. He appeared not to understand.

“My will is good, Sir Philip. I’d give a portion to Alice heartily if I had it to give. Thousands, I’m sure, the young people should be welcome to, if they needed it.”

“Do you mean to say that you—that you will not bestow any portion whatever upon your daughter when she marries?” asked Sir Philip, in a tone of cold astonishment,

“I’m sorry that I can’t do it,” said the Major. “I wish I could. If that lost money of mine would only turn up——”

“Then, I am afraid, I—cannot say what I had come to say,” returned Sir Philip with the air of a man who deliberates aloud, and quite ignoring the added sentence. “I could not advise my son to settle upon the few

hundreds a year that make up his present income."

"Why, it's plenty," cried the candid Major. "You have just said yourself that young people cannot expect to begin as they will end. Your son's is a rising income: if he makes seven hundred this year, he may expect to make ten next, and double the seven the year after. It is ample to begin upon, Sir Philip."

"No," dissented Sir Philip. "Neither he nor I would consider it so. Something should be put by for a rainy day. This communication has completely taken me by surprise, Major Raynor. We took it for granted that your daughter would at least add her quota to the income: had it been but three or four hundred a year. Without money of her own, there could be no settlement on her, you see, my son's not being real property."

The Major was growing a little heated. He did not at all like the turn the conversation was taking, or Sir Philip's dictatorial tone.

"Well, you hear, Sir Philip, that Alice has nothing. Those who wish to take her must take her as she is—portionless—or not at all."

Sir Philip Stane rose. "I am sorry then,

Major, that I cannot ask what I was about to ask—for *her*. Your daughter ——”

“You are not wanted to ask it, sir,” hotly interrupted the Major.

“The fact of your daughter’s being portionless debars it,” quietly went on the knight. “I am very sorry indeed to have troubled you, and subjected myself to pain. William must consider his pretensions at an end.”

“They are at an end,” fired the Major. “If it is money he has been thinking of all this while, he ought to be ashamed of himself for a calculating, mercenary young rascal. Were he to come to me on his knees, after this, begging for my daughter, he should not have her. That’s my answer, Sir Philip Stane, and you can take it away with you.”

The Major’s tug at the bell-rope sent a peal echoing through the house. But Sir Philip Stane’s hand was already on the door handle, letting himself out with a short “good morning.”

Away went the Major, hunting for Alice. He found her with her mother. Hotly and explosively he gave an account of the interview : of what he called the mercenary conduct

of Sir Philip and William Stane. Poor Alice turned hot and cold; flushed red and white by turns. She took the indignity—as she was pleased to think it—quite as resentfully as the Major.

“I forbid you to have anything to do with him after this, Alice. I forbid you to see him more.”

“You need not forbid me, papa,” was the answer. “I should not think of it.”

Major Raynor was one who could not keep in anything, good or bad, especially any grievance. He went about the house looking for Charles and Frank, that he might impart the news and so let off a little of his superfluous anger. But he could not find either of them.

Matters were going on much as usual. Daisy was progressing so far towards recovery that she could sit at the open window of her chamber and revel in the balmy air, while feasting her eyes with the beauteous landscape. Charles was in a little extra trouble; for he had been written to twice upon the subject of the fifty pound bill that was over-due. And Frank, outwardly gay as the flowers of May, was inwardly on thorns and nettles.

That that mysterious personage, the Tiger, was wasting his days and his hours at Grassmere on Frank Raynor's account, Frank felt persuaded of. To him it seemed a fact indisputable. The man did not molest him ; he did not appear to take particular notice of him ; he had not yet accosted him : but Frank knew that all the while he was craftily watching his movements, to see that he did not escape. It needed not a conjuror to tell him that the Tiger was the spy of Blase Pellet.

The espionage was growing intolerable to Frank. And on this very day, just about the time that Sir Philip Stane was at Eagles' Nest, he flung prudence to the winds, and questioned the enemy. The Tiger had wandered as near to the house as he could go without being guilty of a positive trespass : and Frank, chancing to turn out of what was called Beach walk, came upon him face to face. It was the first time they had thus closely met. For half a minute they gazed at each other. The Tiger stood his ground, and quietly took from his pocket a small note-case of brown morocco leather, with the initials " C. R." stamped upon it in gilt.

“Does this belong to you?” questioned the Tiger.

“Not to me,” replied Frank. “But I believe it belongs to my cousin, Mr. Raynor.”

“I picked it up a few minutes ago as I was strolling along. Perhaps you will be so good as to give it to its owner.”

Frank took the case from the Tiger, and thanked him. Even to this man, suspecting him as he did for a despicable spy, he could but be courteous. And, indeed, but for the suspicion, Frank would have rather liked the man's face, now he saw it closely; the thought passed through his mind that, for a Tiger, he was a civilized one. There was a tone of pleasant freedom in the voice; the dark grey eyes, gazing steadily into Frank's, were earnest and good.

“You come from Trennach,” said Frank suddenly, speaking upon impulse.

“From Trennach?” repeated the stranger, vaguely, and evincing no surprise.

“Or from some one there,” continued Frank. “Employed by him to — to look after his villainous interests here.”

“I am my own employer, young man.”

“What is your name, pray?”

“If I thought it concerned you to know it, I might, perhaps, inform you,” was the answer, civilly delivered.

“But suppose it does concern me?”

“’Tis my opinion it does not.”

“At any rate your business here does.”

“Does it?”

“Will you deny that you have business here? Business of a private nature?”

“I cannot deny that, for it is true.”

“And that your business consists in peeping, and watching, and spying?”

“You are partly right.”

“And,” continued Frank, growing warm, “don’t you think that to peep and to spy is a despicable proceeding?”

“In some cases it may undoubtedly be so regarded,” was the calm, cool answer. “In other cases it is perfectly justifiable. When some end, for instance, has to be obtained: or, let us say, a problem worked out.”

“The Devil can quote Scripture, we are told, to serve his own purposes,” muttered Frank to himself as he turned away, afraid of pursuing the subject, half afraid of what revelation the

man might make, and of his fearless grey eyes and their steadfast gaze.

They strode apart from one another at right angles. The stranger with careless, easy steps, with profound composure : Frank less easy than usual.

“ I wonder,” soliloquised he, “ whether Pellet has let him into that unhappy night’s secret, or whether he has but given him general instructions to look after me, and has kept him in the dark? Any way, I wish Blase Pellet was ——”

The wish, whatever it might have been, was left unspoken. For the Tiger had changed his course. Had turned to follow Frank at a fleet pace, and now came up with him.

“ Will you tell me, sir, what induced you to assume that I had come here from Trennach? And for what purpose I am ‘ spying ’?—and upon whom? ”

“ There’s no need to tell you,” rejoined Frank. “ You know too well already.”

“ And if I tell you that I do not know? ”

“ I hope you don’t. It’s all the same,” returned Frank indifferently, believing he was being played with.

“Perhaps you have run up debts at Trennach, and are mistaking me for a sheriff’s officer?” proceeded the Tiger, once more gazing steadfastly at Frank as he spoke. “Your cousin, the Major’s son, has been taking me for one.”

“How on earth did he get to know that?” thought Frank. And it seemed to be so confirmatory a proof of the Tiger’s accomplishments in the prying line, that Frank felt as much exasperated as his sweet-tempered nature could allow him to feel.

“Your road lies that way, and mine this,” spoke Frank, with a commanding wave of the hand. “Good morning.”

The Tiger stood still, looking after his receding footsteps. A very peculiar expression sat on his face, not altogether complimentary to Frank.

“A curious lot, these Raynors,” concluded he to himself as he turned to pursue his own way.

It was perhaps rather remarkable that Charles Raynor should also, on this same day, be brought into speaking contact with the Tiger for the first time. Charley’s troubles were

culminating to a point: at least, in so far that he was about to be pressed for one of his debts, though he knew it not. It would come upon Charley something like a shock. Since fear, on the score of the Tiger, had subsided, he had enjoyed a complete immunity from *personal* annoyance; and this had lulled his apprehensions to rest; so that he went about here, there, and everywhere, feeling free as air.

He had been out in the dog-cart all the morning. Upon going indoors on his return, by the entrance that was nearest to the stables, he, in passing the butler's pantry, saw Lamb standing in it. The man made a sudden movement as though he would speak with him, and it arrested Charley.

"Do you want me, Lamb?" he asked, halting to put the question.

Lamb dropped his voice to a mysterious whisper, and Charley instinctively moved inside, and shut the door behind him. Lamb knew nearly as much about his young master's embarrassments as he himself knew.

"A party has been here this morning who wanted to see you, Mr. Charles. When I said you were out—gone up to London, I thought

—he seemed as if he'd hardly believe me. I began to think I shouldn't get rid of him."

"Who was it?" asked Charles.

"It was a respectable looking man, sir. Highly respectable, one might be tempted to call him, if his errand had not been to bother people for money. Being near the neighbourhood, he had turned aside to Grassmere to see you, he said, and his business with you was particular. Of course I knew what it all meant, Mr. Charles, and I declared you were gone out for the day and couldn't be seen though he waited till night."

"I wonder which of them it was?" mused Charley. "Did he give his name?"

"Yes, sir; Huddles. He ——"

"Oh, Huddles, is it," interrupted Charley, his mouth falling. "I'm glad I didn't see him. Is he gone for good, do you think, Lamb?"

"I should say so, sir. I fully impressed upon him that his waiting would be no earthly use. I even said, Mr. Charles, that there was no answering for your return when you went to London, and that you might be there a week, for all I could say. I told him he had better

write to you, Mr. Charles. 'Very well,' he said in answer, and went off with a rapid step: no doubt to catch the next train."

"That's all right then," said Charley, completely reassured. "Any visitors been here, Lamb?"

"Sir Philip Stane called, sir. And some ladies are in the drawing-room now. Would you like some refreshment, Mr. Charles?"

"No, I'll wait till dinner time."

But it wanted some two or three hours to dinner time yet. Presently Charles went strolling out on foot, digesting the unpleasant item of news that his father had just hastened to impart to him—the sneaking behaviour (as he called it) of William Stane. Charles felt greatly vexed and annoyed at it for Alice's sake. He was sure there was a mutual attachment, and had believed that they understood each other.

Lost in reflections on this subject, and never giving as much as a thought to the matter imparted to him by Lamb, his eyes never raised, his footsteps wandering on almost as they would, Charley found himself passing along the common, on the side of the better-

most houses. Some words of salutation greeted him.

“ Good afternoon, sir. A hot day again, is it not ? ”

They came from Miss Jetty, the carpenter's sister. She was sitting at work at her open window. Charles lifted his eyes to nod to her ; and that enabled him to see some one who was approaching at a short distance. *Huddles*. Charley recognised him ; and on the spur of the moment he darted into the carpenter's to hide himself.

“ I hope and trust he did not see me ! ”

But Mr. Huddles did see him. Mr. Huddles came up with a long stride, and was inside the house almost as soon as Charley was. Charley could not pretend to be blind then. He stood just within Esther Jetty's sitting-room ; and the applicant stood in the passage facing him.

“ I called at Eagles' Nest to-day, Mr. Charles Raynor, and could not see you. You know of course what it was I wanted ? ”

Charles was taken to. What with the unpleasantness of the surprise, what with the consciousness of the helpless state of his

finances, and what with the proximity of Miss Esther Jetty's eyes and ears, raised in curiosity, he was turning frightfully cross. A few sharp, haughty words greeted Huddles, apparently causing him astonishment. This application concerned one of the two "bills" given by Charley; the one on which no proceedings had as yet been taken.

"Can you meet that bill, Mr. Charles Raynor?"

"No, I can't," replied Charles. "I wrote you word that I would meet it as soon as I could; that bill and the other also; and so I will. You must wait."

"For how long, Mr. Raynor? It is inconvenient to wait."

Charles flew into a passion. But for Esther Jetty's presence, he would have managed much better; that of course behoved him to carry matters with a high hand, and he showered some abuse on Mr. Huddles in haughty language, forgetful of diplomacy. Mr. Huddles, not at all the right sort of man to be dealt with in this manner, repaid him in his own coin. Had Charles met him civilly, he would have been civil; ay, and forbearing. The bills

—he held them both—had only come into his hands in the course of business. He was really respectable, both as a man and a tradesman, not accustomed to be spoken to in such fashion, and most certainly in this instance not deserving to be. His temper rose. A short, sharp storm of words ensued, and Mr. Huddles went out of the house in anger, leaving a promise behind him.

“ I have been holding the two bills over for you, Mr. Charles Raynor, and staying proceedings out of consideration for you and at your request. And this is the gratitude I get ! The affair is none of mine, as you know ; and what I have done has been simply out of good nature, for I was sorry to see so young a man in danger of exposure, perhaps of a debtors’ prison. I will not delay the proceedings another day. The bills shall pass out of my hands, and you must do the best you can for yourself.”

While Charles stood knitting his brow and looking very foolish, staring at the front door, which still vibrated with the bang Mr. Huddles gave it, and not half liking to turn round to face Esther Jetty, the parlour door in front of

him on the other side of the passage, which had been ajar all the time, was pulled open, and the Tiger appeared at it. He must have been an ear-witness to the whole. It did not tend to decrease Charley's annoyance : and, in truth, the sudden appearance of this man upon the scene, in conjunction with the visit of Huddles, revived Charley's suspicions of him. The Tiger's face wore quite a benevolent aspect.

"Can I be of any use to you?" he asked. "I will be if I can. Step in here, Charles Raynor, and let us talk it over."

Charley lost his head. The words only added fuel to fire. Coming from this sneak of a sheriff's officer, or whatever other disreputable thing he might be, they sounded in his ears in the light of an insult—a bit of casuistry designed to entrap him. And he treated them accordingly.

"*You* be of use to me!" he contemptuously retorted, with all the scorn he could call up. "Mind your own business, man, if you can. Don't presume to interfere with mine."

And out of the house strode Charley, banging the door in his turn, and sending a good afternoon to Esther Jetty through the open window.

The Tiger shrugged his shoulders with a disdainful gesture: as much as to say that the young man was not worth a thought and he washed his hands of him and his concerns. Taking up his slouching hat, he put it well over his forehead, stood for a few minutes at the outer door, and then passed through the little gate.

“Wouldn’t you like your tea, sir?” called out Esther Jetty from the window. “I was just about to get it.”

“Presently,” replied the Tiger.

Meanwhile Charles Raynor was striding towards home, full of bitter repentance. All the folly of his recent conduct was presenting itself before him.

“I wish I had met the fellow differently!” he soliloquised, alluding to Huddles. “There can be no more staving-off now. A day or two and they will be down upon me. I think I was a fool! What a to-do there’ll be at home! How on earth will the money be found?—and what will be the upshot?”

Indeed, it seemed that, with one thing and another, Eagles’ Nest was not altogether comfortable. Most of its inmates had some secret trouble to try them. And yet it was not

twelve months since they had entered upon it, all glee and joy, believing their days there would be delightful as in a second Paradise !

The next afternoon but one, Saturday, brought William Stane. Alice chanced to be in the shrubbery, and met him. His countenance proved that he felt vexed, doubtful, ill at ease. Instead of the tender glance and smile that had been wont to greet Alice, he had a grave eye and knitted brow. The look angered her, even more than had the reported words of Sir Philip on the Thursday before.

What precisely passed between them perhaps neither could afterwards clearly recal. He said something about how sorry he was that their happy intercourse should have been marred ; Alice interrupted him with a sharp and haughty word. William Stane retorted ; and things were spoken between them, in the moment's ill-feeling, that could neither be unsaid nor qualified. Prejudiced by his father's account of the unsatisfactory interview with the Major, he had come, naturally inclined to espouse his father's side ; Alice on her part upheld their own cause. Very short indeed was the scene, but it was a decisive one.

“I am sorry to have been so mistaken in you, Miss Raynor,” he said, turning to depart. “No great harm has, however, been done.”

“None,” returned Alice. “Fare you well.”

He raised his hat without speaking, and the echoes of his retreating footsteps died away in the shrubbery.

Thus they parted. The fault being at least as much Alice’s as his. Whether he had come to smooth matters, to repudiate the fiat Sir Philip had pronounced, Alice knew not, but she did not allow him the opportunity. If the possession of Eagles’ Nest had taught nothing else to Major Raynor’s children, it had certainly taught them self-arrogance. The world seemed made for them, and for them alone.

Alice went upstairs humming a gay song, and passed into Daisy’s room. She halted at the glass, glancing at her pretty face, at the brightness of the blue eyes, at the unusual colour on her cheeks, and touching here and there her light brown hair. Frank’s wife turned round.

“You are gay this afternoon, Alice.

“Gay as a fairy,” replied Alice. “It is lovely out of doors. The sun’s shining and the birds are singing.”

A few days went on. Charley was in a state of inward collapse. For, not one single minute in those days came and passed, but he was looking out for some dreadful shock, emanating from the enemy, Huddles. Each night, as the dusk fell, he felt not at all thankful that the blow had kept off, concluding that the morrow would bring it. It seemed to him at times that the falling of it would bring relief, by ending his almost unbearable suspense. He wished he lived in the old days of barbarism and pilgrimages; that he might follow the fashion and set out to some distant holy shrine, with hard peas in his shoes and fretting horsehair next his skin. The peas and the horsehair would be pleasant, in comparison with this mental torment.

Alice continued gay; gay as a lark. Was it put on, this gaiety, or was it real? Perhaps she herself did not know.

“You could not have cared much for William Stane, Alice, or he for you,” one day remarked her mother, to whom the affair had given pain,

interrupting Alice in the carolling of a song, sung to an impromptu dance.

“Cared for him, mamma!” she returned in her spirit of bravado. “I am well rid of him.”

Mrs. Raynor sighed. Alice had so changed: not, she feared, for the better. So had Charles. Good fortune had ruined them all.

CHAPTER VI.

STARTLING TIDINGS.

THE first of June. A day destined to be an eventful one at Eagles' Nest. At five o'clock in the morning the house was aroused from its peaceful slumbers by a commotion. Mrs. Raynor's bell was ringing violently; Mrs. Raynor's voice was calling for help in loud and anxious tones. Major Raynor had been taken ill.

Frank was the first at the bed side. His uncle lay unconscious, or partly so, exhibiting alarming symptoms. An attack of some kind seemed imminent; Frank thought it would be apoplexy. Other advice was sent for.

Long before the usual hour for breakfast, breakfast had been taken, and the family hardly knew what to do with themselves. Dr. Selfe, a clever man, residing near, had seen Major Raynor—who now seemed to be somewhat better. The doctor quite agreed with

Frank that the symptoms were indicative of apoplexy; but he thought that it might be staved off, at least for the present, by the aid of powerful remedies. These remedies had been applied, and the patient was decidedly improving. He did not speak much, but was quite conscious. On these occasions, when one out of the home circle is lying upstairs in sudden and most dangerous illness, the house is utterly unsettled. Habits and customs are changed; nobody knows what to be at.

“I shall have some more coffee,” said Charles, ringing the bell. “There’s nothing else to do.”

Lamb came in and received the order—some hot coffee. The breakfast things were still on the table. This was one of the pleasantest rooms in the house: small and cosy, with glass doors opening to the garden. It faced the west, so was free from the morning sun: but, beyond the shade cast by the house, that sun shone brightly on the smooth green grass, on the clustering flowers of many colours. The chairs, curtains, and carpet of the room were purple. Mrs. Raynor’s little work-table stood in one nook, opposite to it was a low open

book-case. The chimney-piece was low and modern, its hearth was filled with ferns, its large glass reflected the room and its furniture. Frank, standing close, could see in it the breakfast-table and its contents, with the stand of fresh flowers in the middle.

While waiting for the coffee, which had to be made, Charles leaned against the side of the window, half indoors, half out, whistling softly and keeping a good look out around, lest any Philistine should approach him unawares. This illness of his father's complicated matters frightfully. In the midst of Charley's worst apprehensions there had lain, down deep in his heart, a vista of possible refuge. He had been wont to whisper to himself, "When things come to a crisis, my father will no doubt find a way to help me;" and the hope had been to his spirit as so much healing balm. But his father, lying in this state, could not be applied to: his repose of mind must not be disturbed: and if Charley fell into some tiger's clutches now, what on earth was he to do?

Whistling, softly and unconsciously, a dolorous tune, Charley indulged in these highly agreeable reflections. His mother had not

come downstairs at all. Alice had gone up to Daisy: Kate and Mademoiselle were reading French under the distant walnut tree. Only Frank was there.

“ I do think I can smell haymaking ! ” cried Charley suddenly.

“ Yes,” assented Frank. “ Some fields are down.”

“ Is it not early for it ? ”

“ We have had an early season.”

No more was said. There flashed into Charley's mind a remembrance of the day he had first seen Eagles' Nest: when he had stood at one of the windows, though not this one, gazing out at the charming scenery, at the lovely flowers; inhaling their perfume, and that of the new-mown hay. Association of ideas is potent, and probably that scent of the hay had brought the day to his memory now. Barely a twelvemonth had passed since then: and yet—how anticipations had changed! He had believed then that perfect peace, ease, prosperity must inevitably attend them as the possessors of Eagles' Nest: he remembered picturing to himself the calamity it would have been had the beautiful place passed into others'

hands. But he had lived to learn that care and worry could penetrate even there.

“There’s the postman!” cried Charley. And glad, probably, of the interruption to his thoughts, he went out, and crossed the lawn to meet the man.

“Only one letter this morning,” he exclaimed, coming back, with his eyes fixed on it. “I say, Frank, what is to be done? It is from old Street, and he has put ‘immediate’ on it.”

“You had better open the letter yourself, I should say, Charles: my uncle cannot,” said Frank decisively.

“I wonder what he has to write about: it is not often we hear from him. Nothing particular, I daresay: the good old father has not, I am sure, a secret in the world. Or—do you think,” added Charley, his face lighting with eager hope, “that the money can have turned up? What a glorious thought! Yes, I will open it.”

He broke the seal of the lawyer’s letter. At that moment Lamb came in with the fresh coffee. Frank, still standing by the mantelpiece, watched the man put it down; he stayed

to set two or three things in order on the table before he went out again. As the door closed, Frank's glance chanced to stray to Charley's face."

What was the matter with it? The eager flush of hope had been succeeded by a look of dismay: nay, almost of horror. The letter seemed to be very short. Charley was reading it twice over, growing paler all the while.

"Can it be a hoax?" he cried, in a voice scarcely raised above a whisper, as he held the letter out. "It cannot be true."

Frank took the letter reluctantly. There was no help for it. But a spasm seized on his own face, and a very terrible spasm seized upon his heart. When we are nourishing some great dread, any new and unexplained event seems to bear upon it. His fears had flown back to that dreadful night at Trennach. Was this letter come to betray him?

But the letter proved not to be connected with that. The news it brought was of a nature perfectly open and tangible. Frank's own fears gave place to consternation and dismay as he read the lawyer's words: dismay for his uncle's sake.

“My Dear Sir,—I have just heard a very painful rumour, and I think it my duty to communicate it to you. It is said that the will, under which you succeeded to Mrs. Atkinson’s estate, proves to have been worthless; a fresh will having been discovered. By this later will, it is Mr. George Atkinson who inherits Eagles’ Nest. My information is, I fear, authentic; but I do not yet know particulars.

“This is but a brief note to convey such tidings, but the evening post is on the point of closing, and I do not wish to lose it. I would have run down, instead of writing, but am not equal to it, having for the past week or two been confined to the house.

“Believe me, Dear Sir,

“Sincerely yours,

“Major Raynor.

“JOHN STREET.”

They stood looking at one another, Charles and Frank, with questioning eyes and dismayed faces. Could it be true? No, surely it could not be. Street the lawyer, in spite of the boasted authenticity of his information, must have been misinformed.

So thought, so spoke Charles. "You see," cried he, "he speaks of it at first as but a rumour."

But Frank, in spite of his sanguine nature, regarded the information differently. He began looking at portions of the letter again, and did not answer.

"Can't you speak, Frank?"

"Charley, I fear it is true. Street would never have written this dismal news to your father while there was any doubt about it."

"But it has no right to be true; it ought not to be true," disputed Charley in his dreadful perplexity. "Who is George Atkinson that he should inherit Eagles' Nest? The fellow lives at the other end of the world. In Australia, or somewhere. Frank, it's not *likely*. It would be a frightful injustice; a cruel shame. It has been ours for twelve months: who will wrest it from us now?"

And truly, having enjoyed Eagles' Nest for all that while, regarding it as theirs, living at it in perfect security, it did appear to be a most improbable thing that it should now pass away from them; almost an impossibility.

"Charley, we must keep this letter to our-

selves until we know more. I am almost glad my uncle is ill; it would have shocked him so ——”

“And how long will it be before we do know more?” broke in Charles, who was in a humour for finding fault with everybody, especially the lawyer. “Street ought to have come down, no matter at what inconvenience. A pretty state of suspense, this, to be placed in!”

“Drink your coffee, Charley.”

“Coffee? Oh, I don’t want it now.”

The unfortunate news left Charles no inclination for coffee. Of all the calamities, falling or threatened, that had been making his life uneasy, this was the worst. The worst? The rest were but as light mishaps in the balance. Frank, with all his sunny-heartedness, could impart no comfort. The only possible ray of comfort, to be discerned, lay in the hope that the tidings would turn out not to be true. A hope which grew fainter with every minute’s thought.

To remain in this suspense was nothing less than torture. It was hastily decided between them that Frank should go up to town, see Mr. Street, and learn more. He had no scruple in

doing this : Major Raynor was decidedly better ; in no immediate danger, as Frank believed ; and Dr. Selfe was close at hand in case of need.

Frank lost no time ; hastening to the station, and looking in on Dr. Selfe on his way, to explain that important business was calling him for a few hours to London. Mr. Street's residence was near Euston Square, and his offices were in the same house. The morning was well advanced when Frank got there and was shown into the lawyer's presence. He seemed to look less genial than of yore, as he sat sideways at a table covered with papers, his right foot on a rest : his hair was certainly more scanty ; his light eyes, seen so clearly through his spectacles, were colder. Frank, who, as it chanced, had never seen him, thought what a hard little man he looked.

" Ah, yes ; a sad affair," he remarked, as Frank in a few words introduced himself and his business. Very embarrassing for the Major."

" But I should hope it cannot be true, Mr. Street ? "

" That what cannot be true ?—that there's a later will in existence ? Oh, that is true enough.

And the Major has got an attack, you say ? Misfortunes never come alone."

" May I ask how the fact—that there is a later will—has come to your knowledge ? "

Mr. Street turned over a few of the papers on the table, and took up a letter from amidst them. " I had this note from my brother the banker yesterday afternoon," he said, running his eyes over it. " It tells me that a will, of later date than the one by which Major Raynor holds Eagles' Nest, has been produced, leaving the estate to Mr. George Atkinson. George Atkinson is on his homeward voyage now from Australia, to take possession of the property."

" What a mercy if the ship should go down with him ! " thought Frank in his dismay, as the faint remnant of hope died out. " You—I presume you consider that this unpleasant report may be relied on then, Mr. Street ? "

" Certainly it may. My brother is one of the most cautious men living ; he would not have written in this decisive way"—touching the note with his finger—" had there existed any doubt. Most likely he has heard from George Atkinson himself : he would no doubt write before sailing. Atkinson is virtually his

chief partner, you know, head of the bank. I had thought my brother would, perhaps, call here last night, but he did not. Something or other has come to my ankle, and I can't get out."

"Then—this note from Mr. Edwin Street is all the information you as yet possess?"

"That's all. But I know it is to be relied on. I thought it better to write at once and acquaint the Major: he will have little time, as it is, to prepare for the change and see what can be done."

Frank rose. "I will go down and question Mr. Edwin Street," he said. "I suppose I am at liberty to do so?"

"Oh, quite at liberty," was the reply. "He no doubt wrote to me with the view that I should prepare your family, Mr. Raynor. You will find him at the bank."

The banker received Frank coldly; he seemed to be just the same hard, ungenial, self-contained kind of man that his brother was. Harder, in fact. This was indeed his general manner: but somehow, Frank caught up an idea that he had a dislike to the name of Raynor.

“I beg to refer you to Callard and Prestleigh, Mr. Atkinson’s solicitors,” spoke the banker to Frank, as soon as the latter entered on his business. “They will be able to afford you every necessary information.”

“But won’t you tell me how it has all come about?” cried Frank, his genial manner presenting a contrast to that of the banker. “If Mrs. Atkinson did make a later will, where has the will been all this while? Why should it turn up at a twelvemonth’s end, and not at the time of her death?”

“The will, as I am informed, has been lying in the hands of Callard and Prestleigh.”

“Then why did Callard and Prestleigh not produce it at the proper time?” reiterated Frank.

“Callard and Prestleigh may themselves be able to inform you,” was the short, stiff answer.

Apparently no satisfaction could be extracted from Mr. Edwin Street. Frank wished him good morning, and betook himself to Callard and Prestleigh, who lived near the Temple. “From pillar to post, from post to pillar,” thought he. “I ought to come at something presently.”

Mr. Callard was a white-haired old gentleman ; a little reserved in manner also ; but nevertheless sufficiently cordial with Frank, and did not object to give him information. He took him for the son of Major Raynor ; and though Frank twice set him right upon the point, the old man went back to his own impression, and persisted in thinking Frank to be the (late) heir to Eagles' Nest. It was a mistake of no consequence.

The reader may remember to have been told that when Mrs. Atkinson expressed her intention of making a fresh will in Mr. George Atkinson's favour and leaving Major Raynor's name out of it, she had summoned Street the lawyer to Eagles' Nest to draw it up. Street (as he subsequently informed the Major) had represented the injustice of this to Mrs. Atkinson, and prevailed upon her (as he supposed) to renounce her intention, and to let the old will stand. The lawyer went back to London in this belief ; and nothing whatever transpired, then or subsequently, to shake it. However, after his departure from Eagles' Nest, it appeared that Mrs. Atkinson had sent for a local solicitor, and caused him to draw up a fresh

will, in which she made George Atkinson her heir, and cut off the Major. This will she had kept by her until just before her death, when she sent it, sealed up, to Callard and Prestleigh, requesting them to put it amid Mr. George Atkinson's papers, and hold it at his disposal. There could be no doubt, Mr. Callard thought, that she also, either at the time the new will was made, or close upon her death, wrote to George Atkinson and informed him of what she had done : namely, made her will in his favour and placed the will with his solicitors.

“ But, sir,” exclaimed Frank to Mr. Callard when he had listened to this explanation, “ how was it that you did not bring the will forward at Mrs. Atkinson's death ? Why did you suffer the other will to be proved and acted upon, when you knew you held this one ? ”

“ But we did not know it,” replied the old man : “ you have misunderstood me, my young friend. When Mrs. Atkinson sent the document to us she did not inform us what it was. I assure you we never suspected it was a will. It was sealed up in a parchment envelope, and bore no outward indication of what its contents might be.”

“Then—how do you know it now?”

“Because we have received written instructions from Mr. George Atkinson to open the parchment, and prove the will. It is by the arrival of these instructions we gather the fact that Mrs. Atkinson must have written to inform him such a will existed.”

“He has taken his time—in coming to verify it!”

“It appears—as we hear from Edwin Street—that he was travelling for months in some remote parts of Australia, and did not get his letters. However, he is on his way home now.”

“Is the will opened?—Have you seen it?” asked Frank.

“Both seen it, and read it,” replied the old man, stroking back his smooth white hair, and looking at Frank with concern. “It will be proved in a day or two. I sympathise with you and your father.”

“Who are the executors?”

“George Atkinson and Street the banker. It is the latter who is acting.”

“And Mr. Atkinson is really on his way from Australia.”

“Yes : by ship. We expect him to land in

the course of two or three weeks. His written instructions were received by this last mail, and were conveyed to us through Edwin Street, to whom they were sent. Mr. Atkinson desires that all necessary preliminaries may be executed without delay, as he intends to take possession of Eagles' Nest on his arrival."

"He cannot know that my uncle is in it!"

"I daresay he does. He knew that Major Raynor succeeded to it, for we wrote him to that effect at the time. And he is in regular correspondence with his partner, Edwin Street."

"Then it is all true; the worst is true!" cried Frank, as the full import of what this meant for the poor Major and his family became more and more apparent. "I *wonder* that George Atkinson should accept the estate!—should wrest it from them! From what little I have heard of him—it has not been much—I drew the conclusion that he was a kind and a just man."

Mr. Solicitor Callard opened his eyes very widely. The words surprised him. "Kind! Just!" cried he. "Well, so he is: we know him well: but, my good young sir, a will is a

will. You can't ignore a will as you might a spoken message."

"It will be a terrible shock to my uncle and his family. Utter ruin."

The old gentleman shook his head in pity.

"Ay, it's sad, no doubt; very. We lawyers often have to inflict grievous blows: and we cannot help ourselves."

"One last question," said Frank, as he prepared to leave. "In the old will, Major Raynor was left residuary legatee, and therefore came in for all the accumulated money—though in point of fact the bulk of it has not yet been found. Who comes in for it now?"

"George Atkinson. My good young friend, George Atkinson comes in for *everything*. The one will may be called a counterpart of the other; in regard to the small legacies, and all else; save that George Atkinson's name is substituted for Major Raynor's."

"Is nothing left to the Major in this later one?"

"Nothing."

Frank Raynor went back to Eagles' Nest, carrying his deplorable news with him. Careless and sanguine-natured though he was, he

could not shut his eyes to the dark future. It was not only the loss of the estate. That would have been bad enough, in all conscience ; but there was also the money the Major had spent. The ready money that had been lying at Eagles' Nest and at her bankers at the time of Mrs. Atkinson's death ; and also this past year's revenues from the estate. The Major had spent it all : and for this he was now accountable to George Atkinson ; he could be legally called upon to refund it. A suspicious fear crossed Frank that he would be so called upon : a hard man, as he was now judging George Atkinson to be—perhaps without just cause—would most likely exact his full rights, no matter what misery and ruin devolved in consequence upon others. In Frank Raynor's chivalrous good nature, he was thinking that George Atkinson, already a wealthy man, might have refused to take Eagles' Nest, have left the Major in peaceable possession of it. Perhaps very few men would agree with him : as the old lawyer said, a will was a will. This much was certain : that, no matter how large a sum the law might claim from Major Raynor, he had not a shilling to meet it with. Would they

confiscate his annuity until it was paid—that five hundred a year; which was all he and his children would now have to fall back upon? “I wish with all my heart I had a good home for them, and a good practice to keep it up!” concluded Frank.

Poor Major Raynor! He was never to be subjected to this trouble; or to any other trouble in this world. It was past six when Frank got back to Eagles’ Nest, and he found his uncle dying. The attack that was dreaded had seized on him about an hour before: just twelve hours after the first threatening in the morning; and there was now little, if any, hope.

“Oh, my dear,” gasped Mrs. Raynor in her pitiable distress, letting her head fall on Frank’s shoulder, as her tears rained down, “it is so sudden! If he could but recover consciousness, and speak to us!”

“Aunt,” he said, his own eyes misty, “don’t you think we had better send for Edina? She would be a comfort to you.”

“Edina!” was the sobbing answer. “My dear, she was telegraphed for this morning. Lamb went to the station just after you left.

I know she would come off at once : she is on her way now. I could never bear up under this trouble without Edina."

"But she does not know of the other trouble," thought Frank, looking on Mrs. Raynor with pitying eyes. "It must be broken to her by Edina."

CHAPTER VII.

FRANK RAYNOR FOLLOWED.

THE whole house was steeped in grief—for Major Raynor had died at dawn. As most houses are, when a near and beloved relative is removed: and the anguish is more keenly felt if the blow, as in this case, falls suddenly. Edina was a treasure now; she had travelled by night and was early at Eagles' Nest. Mourning with them sincerely, she at the same time strove to cheer. She whispered of a blessed meeting hereafter, where shall be no more parting; she would not let them sorrow without hope. Even Mrs. Raynor felt comforted: and the little children dried their ready tears, saying that their dear papa was with the angels in heaven, and they should go to him when God saw that they were good enough.

But, of that other misfortune none of the household as yet were cognisant. Frank took

an opportunity of revealing it to Edina. It nearly overwhelmed even her.

“Eagles’ Nest not theirs !” she cried, in a dread whisper. “Eagles’ Nest George Atkinson’s !”

“And the worst of it is,” returned Frank, running through a brief summary of the details he had heard, “that he means to exact his rights at once, and take immediate possession of the place as soon as he lands. Did you not know this George Atkinson once, Edina ?”

“Yes — a little,” she answered, a faint blush tingeing her cheek at the remembrance.

“Was he selfish and hard then ?”

“I—cannot quite tell, Frank. He did not appear to me to be so.”

“Perhaps not. He was young then : and men get harder as they get older. But now, Edina, what is to be done ? They will have to turn out of this house, and where will they find another ?”

The problem seemed to be as hard as was that gentleman, now on the sea on his homeward voyage : George Atkinson. Edina sat in an attitude of almost despair as she tried to

solve it : her hands folded quietly on her black dress ; her usually calm, good face perplexed ; her steady eyes anxious. The unexpected blow had fallen on her sharply ; and in these first moments it was a hard task to battle with it. Suddenly lifting her two hands, she laid them on the smooth brown hair on either side her temples—as if she felt a pain there. So far as she or anyone else could see, the Raynors would not have a penny piece to fall back upon : no income of any kind, more or less. The Major's annuity had died with him.

“ They are all so helpless ! ” she murmured.

“ Of course they are,” assented Frank.

“ Not that that makes it any worse or better.”

“ It makes it all the worse,” said Edina.

“ Were they experienced and capable, they might do something or other to earn a living.”

A whole world of surprise shone in the candid blue eyes of Frank Raynor. “ Earn a living ! ” he exclaimed. “ Who would earn it ? ”

“ All of them who are old enough,” said Edina. “ Mrs. Raynor and Alice to begin with.”

“ Surely you cannot think of such a thing for *them*, Edina ! ”

“ But how else will they exist, Frank ? Who will keep them ? Charley will never be able to do it.”

A blank pause. Frank, brought thus practically face to face with the position, was unable to answer.

“ I wish to goodness I could keep them ! ” he exclaimed at length. “ I wish I had a practice and a house over my head ! They should all come to it.”

“ It has surprised me very much indeed, Frank — to go from the other subject for a moment — that you have not sought to establish yourself all this time.”

“ I was waiting for some money to do it with, Edina. Poor Uncle Francis was constantly expecting those lost funds to turn up. It seems they would have belonged to George Atkinson if they had come to light : but we could not have known that.”

“ Your Uncle Hugh blamed you for it, Frank. ‘ Better for him to take a situation as an assistant, than to fritter away his days at Eagles’ Nest,’ he used often to say.”

Frank made no reply. The mention of his Uncle Hugh brought vividly to his mind that last ominous letter of warning he had received from him. With his usual incaution he spoke on the moment's impulse.

"Is Blase Pellet at Trennach still?"

Not quite immediately did Edina answer. Raising his eyes, he met hers fixed on him. And he saw something in their depths that he did not like: an anxious, questioning, half-terrified expression.

"Edina knows about it," thought he. And he turned as cold as the frost in winter.

"Yes, Blase Pellet is there as usual," she replied, averting her eyes. "And Mrs. Bell has left Trennach for good and is gone to live at Falmouth."

Why, the very answer; that last sentence, added gratuitously; would of itself have been enough to betray her cognizance. Else why should she mentally have connected the Bells with Blase Pellet? Frank quitted the topic abruptly.

Not until after the funeral — which took place, as was deemed expedient, on the fourth

day from the death—were the tidings of their penniless state conveyed to Mrs. Raynor and the rest. How Charles had contrived to keep counsel he never knew. He was looked upon as the successor to Eagles' Nest. Servants and others came to him perpetually for directions—Is this to be done, sir; is the other to be done: treating him as the master.

Mrs. Raynor received the news with incredulity, astonishment contending with disbelief. Alice burst into tears; Alfred went into a passion. They talked foolishly at first, saying they would go to law: the newly-found will should be disputed; the property flung into Chancery. The only two, capable of bringing reason to bear upon the matter, were Frank and Edina: and they might have been nearly as bad as the rest, had the tidings only just burst upon them. They pointed out how worse than futile any opposition would be. Not a shadow of doubt could exist that the second will was perfectly correct and legal, and that the whole of the property belonged to George Atkinson.

On the second day after Frank's return from London, while the poor Major lay dead in the house, Charles received an official letter from

Street the lawyer. It gave in detail the particulars already known, as connected with the new will, and stated that Mr. George Atkinson was then on his voyage to Europe, with sundry other statements and hints. This letter Frank read aloud now.

“You see,” he said, “even our own lawyer gives in. He says not a word about opposition. No, there’s no help for it; Eagles’ Nest must go from you. But I think old Aunt Atkinson ought to have been ashamed of herself.”

“She must have been dreadfully wicked,” sobbed Alice.

One thing they did not tell Mrs. Raynor—that she could be made responsible for the money received (and spent) during the past twelvemonth. The claim was not yet made; would not be until Mr. George Atkinson’s arrival; time enough to tell her then.

What their plans were to be, or where they could go, or how live, was the subject of many an anxious thought, as the days passed on. Edina suggested this and that; but poor Mrs. Raynor and Alice shrunk from all. As yet they could not realize what the turning-out of Eagles’

Nest would be, and instinctively shunned the anticipation.

But upon none did the blow fall so bitterly as upon Charles. He was suddenly flung from his lofty position on the height of a pinnacle to its base. A few days ago he was an independent gentleman, an undergraduate at Oxford, the heir to Eagles' Nest; now all these desirable accessories had melted away like icicles in the sunbeams. He must work for a living if he were to live; he must take his name off the college books, failing means to return to college; he must, for his mind's best peace, forget that there was such a place as Eagles' Nest.

Work for a living! How was he to do anything of the kind, he asked himself. And even if he were willing, and the work presented itself, (some charming, rose-coloured vision of a sinecure post would now and again present itself indistinctly to his imagination) how would he be free to fulfil it, with those wretched debts hanging at his heels?

One little matter did surprise Charles—he heard nothing of Huddles. He had fully expected that, within a day or two of that worthy man's departure, certain sharks of the law, or

—as he seemed to prefer to call them—tigers, would molest and attack him. But nothing of the kind occurred. The days went on and on, and Charles was still not interfered with.

About a fortnight after the death of Major Raynor, a letter arrived from Mr. Street. And, by the way, talking of the Major's death, what a grievous farce his will sounded when it was read. Eagles' Nest was bequeathed to Charles, with liberty to Mrs. Raynor to reside in it for the next ten years; after that, if Charles should deem it expedient that she should leave with the younger children, he was charged to provide her with a home. The Major recommended that a portion of the lost money, when found, should be put out to interest, and allowed to accumulate for her benefit. Quite a large sum was willed away in small bequests. This much to one child, that to another; some to Edina, some to Frank, and so on. The horses and carriages, the linen, some plate, ornaments and trinkets, with sundry other personal things that had come to him with Eagles' Nest, were left to Mrs. Raynor. All this, when read, sounded like a painful farce, a practical joke. These things were all George Atkinson's; and, of the

bequeathed money, the poor Major possessed not a shilling to bequeath.

Mr. George Atkinson safely arrived in England and in London. Lawyer Street wrote to Eagles' Nest to state the fact, and that he had held a business interview with him in the presence of Mr. Callard. Mr. Atkinson, he hinted, was not inclined to deal harshly with the Raynor family, but leniently. He gave them one month in which to vacate Eagles' Nest, when he should himself enter into possession of it; and with regard to the money spent in the past twelve-month, which did in reality belong to him, and to the mesne profits, he laid no claim. Let them go out of his house quietly, and he should say nothing about arrears. It had been spent by Major Raynor under the misapprehension that it was his own, and he would not exact it of the Major's children.

The conditions were, perhaps, as favourable as could be expected from a man of the world: Mr. Solicitor Callard pronounced them to be wonderfully so, cruelly hard though they sounded to the Raynors. *They* thought, taking all circumstances into consideration,—his own wealth,

which must be accumulating yearly, and his non-relationship to the former mistress of Eagles' Nest, and consequently non-claim in justice to inherit it—that Mr. Atkinson should have quietly resigned it to them, and left them in undisturbed possession of it. Frank, once hearing Charley say this, shook his head. *He* should have done this himself, he said, were he George Atkinson; but he feared the world, as a whole, would not; we did not live in Utopia.

And now came in the practical good sense of Edina. After allowing them a day to grieve, she begged them to listen to her ideas for the future. She had been thinking a great deal, but could only hit upon one plan that seemed feasible. It was, that Mrs. Raynor and Alice should establish a school. Alice, a well-educated girl, good musician, and otherwise accomplished, would be of valuable aid in teaching.

Three weeks ago, they would—Alice, at any rate—have turned from the proposition with indignation. But those three weeks had been working their natural effect; and neither Mrs. Raynor nor Alice spoke a dissenting syllable. They had begun to realize the bitter fact that they must work to live. The world lay before

and around them : a cold, cruel, and indifferent world, as it now seemed to them ; and they had not a shelter in it. To keep a ladies' school would be less objectionable than some things, and certainly preferable to starving. Setting up a shop, for instance, or taking to a boarding-house. It was Edina who alluded to these unpleasant resources, and Alice did not thank her for it. Poor Alice had lessons to learn yet. It is true that Alice might go out as a governess, but that would not keep Mrs. Raynor and the young ones.

“ I see only one objection to this school plan of yours, Edina,” spoke poor Mrs. Raynor, who was the first to break the silence which had ensued, as Edina's voice ceased ; while Alice sat with downcast eyes, wet eyelashes, and an aching heart. “ And that is, that I do not know how it is to be accomplished. We have no money and no furniture. It would be easy enough to take a house in some favourable situation, as you suggest ; but how is it to be furnished ? ”

Edina did not immediately answer. Perhaps the problem was rather too much for herself. She sat in thought ; her steadfast eyes gazing

out with a far-away look over the beautiful landscape, that they were so soon to lose.

“Mr. Atkinson intimates that we are at liberty to remove any furniture, or other articles, we may have bought for Eagles’ Nest, that he only wishes it left as it was left by Mrs. Atkinson,” continued Mrs. Raynor: who, in these last few days of trouble seemed to have gone entirely back to the meek-spirited, humble-minded woman she used to be, with not a wish of her own, and thoroughly incapable. “But, Edina, the pieces of furniture would be too large, too grand for the kind of house we must have now, and therefore I am afraid useless. Besides, we shall have to sell these things with the carriages, and that, to pay outstanding debts here that must be paid: the servants’ wages, our new mourning, and the like.”

“True,” replied Edina, somewhat absently.

“Perhaps we could hire some articles: chairs and tables, and forms for the girls to sit on, and beds?” suggested Mrs. Raynor. “Sometimes furniture is let with a house. Edina, are you listening?”

“Yes, I am listening; partly at least; but I was deep in thought just then over ways and

means," replied Edina, arousing herself to her usual mental activity. "A furnished house would never do; it would be too costly; and so, I fear, would be the hiring of furniture. Now and then, I believe, when a house is to be let, the furniture in it can be bought very cheaply."

"But if we have no money to buy it with, Edina?"

"Of course: there's the drawback. I should think the neighbourhood of London would be the best locality for a new school: the most likely one to produce scholars. Should not you, Mary?"

"Yes," assented Mrs. Raynor with a sigh. "But you know all about these things so much better than I do, Edina."

The plans, and the capability of carrying them out, seemed to be, as yet, very indistinct; but at length Edina proposed to go to London and look about her, and see if she could find any suitable place. Mrs. Raynor, always thankful that others should act for her, eagerly acquiesced. Though, indeed, to get a house—or, rather, to get it full of furniture—appeared to be as a very castle-in-the-air. Chairs and

tables will not drop from the skies : and Edina was setting her face most resolutely against running into debt.

“ Now you understand,” Edina said, the morning of her departure, calling Charles and Mrs. Raynor to her, “ that I shall depend upon you to arrange matters here. If I am to find a house for you in London, I may have too much to do to return here, and you must manage without me. Set about what has to be done at once, Charles : get the superfluous furniture out of the house, for sale ; and get your boxes packed, ready to come up. You must be out of Eagles’ Nest as soon as you possibly can ; on account of the heavy expenses still going on while you are in it. Mr. George Atkinson allowed a month : I should quit it in a tithe of the time. Besides that, Mary : you should be on the new spot to begin school before the midsummer holidays are over ; it will give you a better chance of pupils.”

They agreed to all : Charles rather dumpishly, Mrs. Raynor in simple confidence : anything suggested by Edina was sure to be for the best. It was impossible for Charles to rise up yet from the blow. With him, the aspect of things,

instead of growing brighter, grew darker. Each morning, as it arose, was only more gloomy than the past one. A terrible wrong had been dealt out to him—whether by Fate, or by that defunct unjust woman, his Aunt Ann, or by George Atkinson, he could not quite decide, perhaps by all three combined—and he felt at variance with the whole world. Edina had talked to him of plans for himself, but Charles did not hear her with any patience. Looking upon the present and the past, to contrast them, drove him half-mad. That he must do something, he knew quite well, and he intended to do it: but he did not know what that something was to be; he could not see an opening for himself anywhere. Moreover, he also knew that he must make some arrangement with the people at Oxford to whom he owed money.

Another thing had yet to be done—the taking his name off the college books. Charles went down to do this; and to confer with his creditors. Very young men are often most sensitive on the score of debt: Charles Raynor was so: and it seemed to him a formidable and distressing task to meet these men, avow his

poverty, and beg of them to be lenient and wait.

“ I declare I'd rather meet his Satanic majesty, and hold a battle with *him* ! ” cried Charley, as he started forth to the encounter.

But he found the creditors most considerate. They had heard of his reverse of fortune. The news of the fresh will put forward, and the consequent transfer of Eagles' Nest from the Raynors to George Atkinson the banker, had been made much of in the newspapers. One and all met Charles pleasantly ; some actuated by genuine pity for the young man, others by the remembrance that you can't get blood from a stone. Half the sting was taken from Charley's task. He told them truly that he had no present means whatever, therefore could not offer to pay : but he assured them—and his voice was earnest, and they saw he meant it—that he would pay them whenever it should be in his power to do so, though that might not be for years to come. So he and they parted cordially. After all, no one individual debt was very much, though in the aggregate the sum looked formidable.

Mr. Huddles was left till last. Charles

dreaded him most. The debt there was the largest. The two bills were for fifty pounds each, making one hundred ; and the mischief alone knew what the added expenses would be. Not only did Charles dread him because he would have to eat humble pie, which he hated and detested, and beg the man to hold the bills on, but he believed that Mr. Huddles could clap hands upon him without ceremony. Nevertheless he had no choice but to enter on the interview ; for he must know his own position before he could plan-out or venture on any career of life. He went forth to it at dusk ; some dim idea pervading him that tigers and kidnappers might not exercise their functions after sunset.

Mr. Huddles sat alone in his parlour when Charles was shown in : a well-lighted and well-furnished room. Instead of the scowl and the frown Charles had anticipated, he rose with a smile and a pleasant look, and offered a chair to Charles.

“ We were both a little out of temper the other day, Mr. Raynor,” said he ; “ and both, I daresay, felt sorry for it afterwards. What can I do for you ? ”

To hear this, completely took Charles aback.

Down he sat, with some indistinct words of answer. And then, getting up what courage he could, he entered upon the subject of the bills.

“No one can regret more than I that I cannot pay them,” he said. “I have come here to-night to beg of you to be so kind as hold them over. The expenses, I suppose ——”

“I don’t understand you, sir,” interrupted Mr. Huddles. “What bills are you talking of?”

“The two bills for fifty pounds each—I have no others. Although I know how unjust it must seem to ask you to do this, Mr. Huddles, as you are only a third party and had nothing whatever to do with the transaction, I have no other resource but to throw myself upon your good feeling. I am quite unable to take the bills up; you have probably heard of our reverse of fortune; but I will give you my word of honour to do so as soon as ——”

“The bills are paid,” cried Mr. Huddles, not allowing him to go on.

“Paid!” echoed Charley.

“Paid; both of them. Why—did you not know it?”

“No, that I did not. Who has paid them?”

“ Some legal firm in London.”

“ What firm ? ”

“ The name was—let me see—Symmonds, I think. Yes, that was it : Symmonds and Son, solicitors.”

Charley could only stare. He began to think Mr. Huddles was playing a joke upon him ; perhaps to turn round on him afterwards.

“ I don’t know any people of the name of Symmonds, or they me,” said he. “ How *came* they to pay ? ”

“ I think Major Raynor—I was sorry to see his death in the *Times* so soon afterwards—gave them the necessary orders.”

Charles shook his head ; it was not at all likely, as he knew. He lost himself in a maze of thought.

“ The evening I saw you, I was running into the station to catch a train, having lingered rather too long at the inn over some late refreshment,” explained Mr. Huddles, perceiving that Charles was altogether puzzled, “ when a gentleman accosted me, asking if my errand at the place had not been connected with Major Raynor’s son. I replied that it had. This gentleman then said that if I would

furnish the particulars of the debt to Messrs. Symmonds and Son, solicitors, of London, they would no doubt see that I was paid; and he handed me their address. I sent the particulars up the next day, and in the course of a post or two received the money."

"It must have been Frank," thought Charles, the idea flashing into his mind. "What was this gentleman like, Mr. Huddles?"

"Upon my word, sir, I can hardly tell you," was the reply. "The train dashed in just as he began to speak to me; several passengers were waiting for it, and there was a good bit of confusion. It was dusk also. Nearly dark, in fact."

"A good-looking, pleasant-speaking fellow?"

"Yes, I think so. He had a pleasant voice."

"Nobody but Frank," decided Charles. "It's just like him to do these good-natured things. I wonder how he found the money? And why in the world did he not tell me he had done it?"

So this great trouble was at an end; and Charles might for the present be pronounced free from worry on the score of debt. If the Fates had been bitterly hard to him latterly, it

seemed that they yet held some little kindness in store for him.

But this visit to the University city was productive of the most intense chagrin in other ways to Charles Raynor; of the keenest humiliation. "But a short while ago, I was one of *them*, with the world all before me that I could hold my head up in!" he kept telling himself, as he watched the undergraduates passing in the street, he holding himself aloof from them, for he had not the courage to show his face. If by unavoidable chance he encountered one or two, he got away as quickly as he could, after exchanging a few uncomfortable sentences. While they, knowing of his change of circumstances, of the blighting of his prospects, made no effort to detain him; and if their manner displayed a certain restraint, springing from innate pity, from delicacy of feeling, Charles put it down to a very different cause, and felt all the deeper mortification.

As he quitted Oxford by an early morning train on his way home, his thoughts were busy with what had passed. For one thing, he found that his days of torment at Eagles' Nest, when he went about in fear of writs and arrest

—or, rather, dared *not* go about—had been without foundation. With the exception of Mr. Huddles—and that was much later—not a single creditor, as all assured him, had followed him there: neither had any written to him, save the one whose letter had by misadventure fallen into the hands of Major Raynor. Who then was the Tiger, Charles asked himself. Could it be that, after all, that fiercely-named man had positively not held any mission that concerned him? It might be so: and that Charles had dreaded and hated him for nothing. The Tiger had left Grassmere now: as Charles happened to know. Jetty said so the other day when he was at Eagles' Nest. To come back again sometime Jetty believed, for the gentleman had said as much to his sister Esther when leaving: he liked the lodgings and liked the place, and should no doubt be visiting them again.

And so, Charles Raynor returned home, relieved on the whole, in spite of his never-lifted trouble, and with a lively feeling of gratitude to Frank Raynor in his heart.

He could not yet personally thank Frank; for Frank and his wife had quitted Eagles'

Nest soon after the funeral of Major Raynor. With the fortunes of its hitherto supposed owners come to an end, Frank could not any longer remain, a weight on their hospitable hands. It was at length necessary that he should bestir himself in earnest, and see in what manner he could make a living for himself and Daisy. One great impediment to his doing this comfortably was, that he had no money. Save a few spare pounds in his pocket for present passing exigencies, he had positively none. The sum he had privately furnished Charles with at Christmas time, would have been useful to him now; but Frank never gave a regret to it. Daisy was not very strong yet, and could not be put about. She was going to stay with her sister, Captain Townley's wife, for two or three weeks, who had just come over from India with her children, and had taken a furnished house in London. Daisy wrote to her from Eagles' Nest proffering the visit: she saw what a convenience it would be to Frank to be "rid" of her, as she laughingly said, while he was looking about for some place that they could settle in. Mrs. Townley's answer had been speedy

and cordial. "Yes, you can come here, Daisy ; I shall be delighted to see you. But what a silly child you must have been to make the undesirable runaway marriage they tell me of ! I thought all the St. Clares had better sense than that."

But the Tiger is not done with yet. On the day that Frank and his wife said farewell to Eagles' Nest, and took the train for London, Frank jumped out of the carriage at an intermediate station to get a newspaper. On his way to jump into it again, he had his eyes on the newspaper, and chanced to go up to the wrong compartment, the one behind his own. Swinging open the door, Frank saw to his surprise that there was no room for him, and at the same moment found his face in pretty close contact with another face ; one adorned with a silky brown beard and the steadfast grey eyes Frank had learned to know.

"This compartment is full, sir."

How far back Frank recoiled at the words, at the sight, he never knew. *It was the Tiger.* With a sinking of the heart, a rush of dismay, he made his way into his own carriage ; and

let the newspaper, that he had been eager for, drop uncared for between his knees.

“ He is following me to town,” cried Frank mentally, in his deep conviction. “ He means to track me. How shall I escape him ?—How shall I escape Blase Pellet ? ”

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(Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty.)

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